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ABSTRACT

Case studies of five rural Nebraska communities identified why some rural communities have survived economic trends stemming from the worst agricultural economic crisis since the Great Depression, while others seem to have surrendered. Background information on each community was gathered from available state, federal, and private information resource banks. Community leaders were identified and interviewed about quality of life, the economy, leadership, and future planning. A synthesis of insights into community success led to development of a series of "clues to rural community survival." The 20 clues are: (1) evidence of community pride; (2) emphasis on quality in business and community life; (3) willingness to invest in the future; (4) participatory approach to community decision making; (5) cooperative community spirit; (6) realistic appraisal of future opportunities; (7) awareness of competitive positioning; (8) knowledge of the physical environment; (9) active economic development program; (10) deliberate transition of power to a younger generation of leaders; (11) acceptance of women in leadership roles; (12) strong belief in and support for education; (13) problem-solving approach to providing health care; (14) strong multigenerational family orientation; (15) strong presence of traditional institutions that are integral to community life; (16) sound and well-maintained infrastructure; (17) careful use of fiscal resources; (18) sophisticated use of information resources; (19) willingness to seek help from the outside; and (20) conviction that, in the long run, you have to do it yourself. This report contains community profiles of 19 successful small towns in Nebraska, Missouri, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado, Kansas, and Texas. (KS)

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Clues to Rural Community Survival

A Publication of the Heartland Center for Leadership Development

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Heartland Center for Leadership Development

Clues to
Rural Community Survival

A Research Report by the

Heartland Center for Leadership Development

Milan Wall, Co-Director
Vicki Luther, Ed.D., Co-Director

PLEASE NOTE:

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Preface

Since this report was first published early in 1987, several hundred copies have been distributed to local governments, Chambers of Commerce, economic development organizations and a wide range of community leaders in more than 40 states and several Canadian provinces.

The information has been used as a discussion tool in many Heartland Center community programs and planning projects. In such discussions, community and organizational leaders have been asked to reflect on their own communities' strengths and weaknesses as a first step towards developing a strategic outlook on the future. *Clues to Rural Community Survival* has been either the focus of or an important part of numerous research presentations and keynote speeches at conferences throughout the country. In addition, the report attracted considerable attention from the news media and resulted in widely syndicated interviews and features.

In every case — requests for the publication as well as with program participants — the response to the *Clues* has been overwhelmingly positive. The dialogues and discussions prompted by the report have also provided us with insights and information valuable to our work.

This enthusiastic response has confirmed our opinion that positive information is highly motivating and that many, many small towns in our country have not only the wisdom and resources to survive but the leadership as well.

The Heartland Center would like to express its sincere appreciation to Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc. and the Center for the New West. With the support of Pioneer, the Heartland Center has been able to continue conducting research in successful rural communities in states beyond Nebraska, where the original research was undertaken with support of the Governor's Office of Policy Research.

With the support of the Center for the New West, the Heartland Center developed "A Model for Case Study Research and Analysis for Studying Communities in Transition." A new section has been added to this latest edition which includes a community case study completed using this research model.

Vicki Luther
Milan Wall

March 1992

Why are some rural communities coping with fundamental restructuring when others seem to have surrendered to crisis?

Background Information

With that question in mind, the Heartland Center for Leadership Development undertook an in-depth study of five rural Nebraska communities with populations ranging from 450 to 6000. The communities were selected from among 20 small towns that were identified as surviving the economic trends stemming from the worst agricultural economic crisis since the Great Depression.

The communities were selected by the Nebraska Governor's Policy Research Office, which sponsored the study. They were selected based on a review of:

- census data
- labor statistics
- geographic representation
- population size
- nominations from people knowledgeable about the state.

The case studies were developed to:

- provide an alternative, positive perspective on rural communities that might contrast with the "dying community" image that has become commonly accepted.
- provide information to state legislative and executive branch leaders for potential use in guiding programs of state government.
- provide an information base for leadership development activities aimed at leaders in rural communities.

Method of Study. After gathering background information on each community from available state, federal and private information resource banks, community leaders were identified and contacted. In each community, both positional leaders and reputational leaders were interviewed (in person or by phone) and each was asked a series of questions under four topics: Quality of Life, the Economy, Leadership, and Future Planning. Information gathered in those interviews was combined with impressions gained from community visits and other informational materials, analyzed for characteristics in common across all communities, and used as background to write community profiles.

Conclusions. A synthesis of insights into community success led to development of a series of possible "clues to rural community survival," and these clues were analyzed and re-analyzed following each community study. Finally, the clues were formalized into the list of 20 Clues to Rural Community Survival included in these materials. ■

20 CLUES TO RURAL COMMUNITY SURVIVAL
An Annotated List

Evidence of Community Pride	Successful communities are often showplaces of community care and attention, with neatly trimmed yards, public gardens, well-kept parks. But pride also shows up in other ways, especially in community festivals and events that give residents an excuse to celebrate their community, its history and heritage.
Emphasis on Quality in Business and Community Life	People in successful communities believe that something worth doing is worth doing right. Facilities are built to last, and so are homes and other improvements. Newer brick additions to schools are common, for example, and businesses are built or expanded with attention to design and construction detail.
Willingness to Invest in the Future	Some of the brick-and-mortar investments are most apparent, but these communities also invest in their future in other ways. Residents invest time and energy in community betterment, for example, and they concern themselves with how what they are doing today will impact on their lives and those of their children and grandchildren in the future.
Participatory Approach to Community Decision-Making	Authoritarian models don't seem to exist in these communities, and power is in fact deliberately shared. People still know who you need on your side to get something done, but even the most powerful of opinion leaders seem to work through the systems — formal as well as informal — to build consensus for what they want to do.
Cooperative Community Spirit	Successful rural communities devote more attention to cooperative activities than to fighting over what should be done and by whom. The stress is on working together toward a common goal and the focus is on positive results. They may spend a long time making a decision, and there may be disagreements along the way, but eventually, as one resident put it, "stuff does get done."

Realistic Appraisal of Future Opportunities

Many of the communities have already learned an important strategic lesson, namely building on your strengths and minimizing your weaknesses. Few small communities believe that they are likely to land a giant industry. Many of them say they wouldn't want one if it came along, fearing that too much reliance on one industry would be unhealthy in any event.

Awareness of Competitive Positioning

The thriving communities know who their competitors are, and so do the businesses in them. Everyone tries to emphasize local loyalty as a way to assist local businesses, but many businesses also keep tabs on their competitors in other towns —they don't want any of the hometown folks to have an excuse to go elsewhere. Business and community leaders worry about what they don't have locally and wonder how many people are driving to other towns to get it.

Knowledge of the Physical Environment

Importance of location is underscored continually in local decision-making, as business and civic leaders picture their community in relation to others. Beyond location, however, communities are also familiar with what they have locally. The kind of agriculture, which is dependent on available natural resources, is an important factor in the local economy.

Active Economic Development Program

An organized and active approach to economic development is common in successful communities and it involves both public and private sector initiatives, often working hand in hand. Private economic development corporations are common, either as an arm or an outgrowth of a chamber of commerce or commercial club.

Deliberate Transition of Power to a Younger Generation of Leaders

Young leadership is the rule more than the exception in thriving rural communities, where people under 40 often hold key positions in both civic and business affairs. In many cases these young people grew up in the town and decided to stay or returned after college. In many other cases, they are people who have decided to make a life in the community even though they grew up elsewhere.

Acceptance of Women in Leadership Roles

Women hold positions of leadership in these rural communities, and those roles extend beyond the traditional strongholds of female leadership. Women are elected as mayors, as presidents of chambers of commerce, and are hired to manage health care facilities, and develop entrepreneurial ventures.

Strong Belief in and Support for Education

Good schools are a point of pride, as well as a stable employment force, and rural community leaders are very much aware of their importance. Residents want their children to get the best education they can afford. Beyond that, the school is often a center of social activity, and sporting and other school events are well-attended.

Problem-solving Approach to Providing Health Care

Local health care is a common concern in rural communities, but strategies for health care delivery vary, depending on community needs. One community decides that keeping a doctor in the town is important; another focuses on emergency medical services; another invests heavily in comprehensive hospital-based services. A health care program, of some kind, is often viewed as essential to the community's health, as well.

Strong Multi-Generational Family Orientation

These are family-oriented communities, with activities often built around family needs and ties. But the definition of family is broad, and it includes younger as well as older generations and people new to the community. In one community, a resident said everyone is considered a cousin shortly after their arrival.

Strong Presence of Traditional Institutions that are Integral to Community Life

Churches represent perhaps the strongest force in this regard, and community activities often include or are centered on the church. Schools play a similar role. Service clubs retain a strong influence, and that influence is felt in community development as well as in social activities.

Sound and Well-maintained Infrastructure

Rural communities understand the importance of traditional infrastructures — such as streets and sidewalks, water systems, sewage treatment facilities — and they work hard to maintain and improve them. But many communities are also worried that in this area especially they'll need outside funding help to keep up, and they wonder whether it will be available to them in the future.

Careful Use of Fiscal Resources

Frugality is a way of life in the successful small communities, and expenditures are made carefully. People aren't afraid to spend money, when they believe they should, and then, typically, things are built to last. But neither are they spendthrifts. Expenditures are, again, often seen as investments in the future of the community.

Sophisticated Use of Information Resources

Rural community leaders are knowledgeable about their communities beyond the knowledge base available in the community. In one town, for example, retail sales histories from a state university were studied for trend information. In another, census data was used to study population change. In another, modern computer equipment kept people up to date on financial matters.

Willingness to Seek Help from the Outside

There's little reluctance in successful rural communities to seek outside help, and many of them demonstrate their success at competing for government grants and contracts for economic development, sewer and water systems, recreation, street and sidewalk improvement, and senior citizen programs.

Conviction that, in the Long Run, You Have to Do It Yourself

Although outside help is sought when appropriate, it is nevertheless true that thriving small communities believe their destiny is in their own hands. They are not waiting for someone else to save them, nor do they believe that "things will turn out" if they sit back and wait. Making their communities good places to live for a long time to come is a pro-active assignment, and they are willing to accept it.

> **"People don't survive in the Sandhills if they aren't self-reliant. That goes for communities as well."**
> **— comment from a Broken Bow resident**

Broken Bow

The town square in Broken Bow, complete with trees, park and bandstand, is a Nebraska treasure. It offers the visitor a strong sense of the past and an immediate feeling for the community. Lined with small businesses, the square presents a picture of people shopping, walking to cafes and lunch spots and stopping to talk. A little below the surface is another image: empty stores and businesses that look as if no business had been carried on for quite a while. "Of course we've lost some businesses...losing the J.C. Penny store was a terrific problem, but that space is occupied now... the parents who bring their kids there for a dance class stop to shop and that's what we want," explained one community leader. Broken Bow is a community that works hard to turn problems into opportunities.

With a population slightly less than 4,000, Broken Bow enjoys a location that puts it "on the way" for many travelers. Those travelers, driving both east and west, do have a considerable impact on the community. Perhaps more important is the impact of the Becton-Dickinson Vacutainer systems plant. As one business owner explained, "Because of that plant, we have a revolving group of talented, interesting people who live in our town. They bring new ideas and new energy — a great resource for us."

" We're committed to straightening out this economic mess," said one business owner. "People here know they can make a difference."

People seem to be one of the community's greatest resources. While Broken Bow residents will mention the excellent schools, the variety of health care facilities and social services that may make the town into a major retirement community, residents always turn back to the people of Broken Bow as the factor that will keep the community strong in the future. "We're committed to straightening out this economic mess," said one business owner. "People here know they can make a difference."

Economic development activities have given Broken Bow a fairly high profile in the state. Newcomers to the community mention a new feeling of action apparent in the last six months, linked to a newly established group of energetic young residents who call themselves "The Nest Builders." They managed to raise $40,000 for economic development efforts in just a few weeks and, while realizing that Broken Bow has felt the impacts of the changes in the farm economy, are determined to discover ways to renew the local economy. "We have lots of folks who are really resistant to change but the action types will pull them along. We have to find ways to help local entrepreneurs make a go of their ideas," commented one Nest Builder.

Broken Bow has enjoyed the support of local residents who chose to share the results of their successes with the community. The Melham family, for example, has made several sizable contributions to the town that required matching funds from residents. One result is a remarkable health care facility. There are many other examples of this type of loyalty on the part of Broken Bow natives. "Every town will talk about problems of consumer loyalty, but Broken Bow has been incredibly lucky to have the loyalty of firms like Brown and Denisia and the Melham contributions," said a community leader. "There's no doubt their help has made this a better place to live."

In addition to the notion that if you are successful, you should contribute some of that success back into the community, the leadership in Broken Bow offers evidence of providing a solid basis for community survival. Many residents commented that no small group controlled the town but, as one community member explained, "Certainly there are leaders that you would ask for help but, these days, that means a fairly large group of individuals who are willing to work together, not just a small group of controllers." Another said, "This is a very open town. If a newcomer arrives and wants to work for the community, it's really easy to take on a leadership role."

> **"Certainly there are leaders that you would ask for help but, these days, that means a fairly large group of individuals who are willing to work together, not just a small group of controllers."**

Getting and using help from outside resources seems to be an approach that community leadership has maximized. Networking and resource linking to state agencies and programs are definitely part of the economic development approach at work in the community. "You may have to be persistent and, at the same time, careful to get what you need, but technical assistance and outside funding can decide the success or failure of a new small business.... After all, if you don't know where to get help, you probably won't get any!" observed a Nest Builder.

"Unlike many other towns in Nebraska, we've never been able to rely on the Interstate to bring us business. Our community has always had to compete because of our location. Economic survival has never been handed to us as a result of traffic!"

One community leader also observed that Broken Bow was in a unique position to survive these hard economic times. "Unlike many other towns in Nebraska, we've never been able to rely on the Interstate to bring us business. Our community has always had to compete because of our location. Economic survival has never been handed to us as a result of traffic! We have to be innovative here," she said.

Like other communities, Broken Bow seems to be in the forefront of efforts to work on economic development from a county-wide perspective. Perhaps because the community is located nearly in the middle of Custer County, Broken Bow has maintained a position of leadership in the effort to get communities working together.

One impact of economic turmoil is an increase in church memberships and related activities. "A crisis makes people care," observed one church member. Broken Bow has a wide representation of churches, many built during the Depression. One new church has been built in the last year.

Perhaps the strain felt in the community of Broken Bow as a result of the crisis in the agricultural economy has had some positive results for the town. Only two years ago a "Rally for Rural America," a public event in support of farmers, attracted few townspeople. Today the community is well aware of the problem. Community leaders know how much the farm crisis has deeply affected the town.

"It all goes back to that Sandhill brand of self-reliance. It's never been easy to make a go of it out here, but," asked a resident, "why would a person want to live anywhere else?"

The increased awareness of shared economic dependence and the need for working together are very apparent in Broken Bow. The vision of the community as a retirement center — for the region, not just the immediate community — seems to be a vision that is shared by community members and leaders. "We've identified some of our strengths. We have the right atmosphere and lifestyle here, the medical facilities and services... and I think we have something to offer in the way of a great place to retire," observed a community leader. "It all goes back to that Sandhill brand of self-reliance. It's never been easy to make a go of it out here, but," asked a resident, "why would a person want to live anywhere else?" ■

"People come here for something that is not someplace else."
—comment from a community leader in Chadron

Chadron

Driving into Chadron from the south, it's no wonder the people here think tourism will play an even stronger role in their community's development in the future. For the last few miles, you drive through Nebraska's pine ridge, as plateau becomes rolling hills and, finally, pine-dotted buttes, until the highway drops gracefully into a broad and lush valley. There, the town sits, literally surrounded by the state's natural beauty.

Not far away, following the White River to the west, is Fort Robinson, one of the nation's most famous "Indian Outposts." This is where Red Cloud brought his people after the great treaties were signed; where Crazy Horse, the mystic Sioux warrior, died; where a young Army doctor named Walter Reed treated "Old Jules" Sandoz.

In addition to the tourist industry, said one community leader "we're destined to become a trade center" because of location. The town's location and geographic isolation have already defined the community as a "center of" kind of place.

Further north, there is Toadstool Park, Nebraska's own barren, windswept badlands. Keep going, and you will reach the Black Hills of South Dakota, with their mammoth rock portraits of American presidents and multitudes of nature's own phenomena.

"Chadron: Gateway to the Black Hills," reads some of the local promotion.

Location is important here. A town of 6,000, a community of perhaps 9,500, counting the State Park community, the Job Corps, the Forest Service centers and the ranches in between, it is 100 miles either north or south before a larger community will appear on the horizon. Driving east (across northern Nebraska) or west (into Wyoming), the traveler would go even further before finding a town of comparable size.

In addition to the tourist industry, said one community leader "we're destined to become a trade center" because of location. The town's location and geographic isolation have already defined the community as a "center of" kind of place:

- Medical facilities here, already extensive, are expanding.
- Human and social services are congregated here, in agencies that specialize in family planning, nutrition for the elderly, alcohol and drug treatment and other services.
- The railroad, busy with coal trains from nearby Wyoming, just expanded its facilities here.
- The Pine Ridge Reservation is just 20 miles north and west, and Chadron is the biggest town that close to the native American population there.

But location has its down side, as well. Prices for retail and consumer goods are higher, one of the few complaints volunteered by local citizens. And the community sometimes feels like a "foster child" to the rest of the state. It is, after all, more than 400 miles to the state's capitol, and nearly 500 to Omaha. (One Chadron resident, asked recently for suggestions on where to hold the next convention for a membership association that had outgrown an Omaha facility, suggested a city in Canada, on the grounds that "it would be closer.")

"Quality of life" is on everyone's mind here, and everyone knows what's good about it. Clear air and clean water rank high on the list, as does the attractive countryside. But so do human traits, such as a small-town atmosphere, a strong sense of community, a family orientation. The word "neighborly" fits nicely. "People here want to know everything about you," joked one resident of six years, "down to the kind of toilet paper you use."

"Quality of life" is on everyone's mind here, and everyone knows what's good about it. Clear air and clean water rank high on the list, as does the attractive countryside. But so do human traits, such as a small-town atmosphere, a strong sense of community, a family orientation.

Quality of life is mentioned often in talk about economic development and the future, when the focus becomes what the town won't do to attract new business. No one here suggests chasing smokestacks as essential to economic development.

Quality of life is mentioned often in talk about economic development and the future, when the focus becomes what the town won't do to attract new business. No one here suggests chasing smokestacks as essential to economic development. "We don't want large industry," said one leader in the business community. His idea of the right kind of manufacturing was the RV business that recently moved to town, employing three full- time and six part-time workers. Or maybe a retirement community, populated by quiet residents with constant incomes and a preference for "high-quality but not fancy" products and services.

Recently, Chadron has in fact been something of a boom town, which the town's leaders concede was not altogether planned or even expected. A freak hail storm last summer raised havoc with virtually every building in town. As a result, some $24 million in improvements were made to homes and businesses, all of it financed by insurance settlements. Construction workers have kept the motels full and helped push consumer spending along.

At the same time, a $5 million addition to the state college campus was being finished, the railroad was expanding its divisional headquarters, and a large church was building a new facility. "Many of these things had been under consideration for 10 years or more," said one community leader. "It's as much timing as push."

Others, however, pointed to the million-dollar downtown improvement project, funded partly with government grants, and said without a lot of push that project would never have taken shape. Or the new supermarket, built by grocers from Broken Bow; the appliance store, expanding from Valentine; the motel, built by a Colorado motel owner. Votes of confidence in the community's future, they say, as recognized by outsiders.

This is a community that has not been hurt that much by the sour agricultural economy devastating some parts of the state. Partly, perhaps mostly, because the main agricultural activity here is cattle-raising, not growing crops. Partly because the ranchers here didn't over-extend themselves on new equipment or high-priced land. "I told the fellas down at the coffee shop that our people didn't fly as high as they did in the irrigation community," said one financial leader. "This country is a lot rougher. They can't see what their neighbors are doing, so they just plug away and keep going," he said, only half joking.

"I told the fellas down at the coffee shop that our people didn't fly as high as they did in the irrigation community," said one financial leader. "This country is a lot rougher. They can't see what their neighbors are doing, so they just plug away and keep going."

That advantage gives the community's leadership an opportunity to think more about the future than to worry about immediate survival, although several community leaders said too much of the community's planning is reactive. One group that doesn't wait for others is called "The Wild Ideas Bunch," a self- proclaimed role. The wild ideas emanate from a dozen community and business leaders who meet regularly — formally or informally — to generate new ideas and then identify who ought to act on them. The downtown improvement project is one result: the group generated an idea for a huge, enclosed mall. When that idea hit the news, "it got a lot of people working on a more sober plan," said one member of the "Bunch."

Much of the community's planning for the future is actually done by others, pretty much outside of the control of community leadership. The college is a major influence on the community, and its impact is both recognized and respected. But its critical planning decisions are made elsewhere. The same is true for the railroad, the Forest Service, the State Park, and the Job Corps. When needed, however, virtually the whole community turns out to help. That was the case when the town celebrated its centennial about a year ago. The celebration required two years of planning and $200,000 in local contributions to make it go.

One resident identified four key leadership groups in the community, ranging from people in official positions to quiet, unassuming leaders whose opinions are highly respected. Another said the community enjoys "situational leadership," meaning that "the same person doesn't take charge each time." Service clubs are usually active in any significant planning.

"When there is a need," said one community leader, "we all work together and get it done."

When people talk about their vision for the community's future, what you hear is what residents of many smaller communities say: we'd like to keep it about the same, maybe a little larger, more economic diversity. Chadron's newspaper has been running, every two weeks, a full page of reminders of good things about the community to "accentuate the positive rather than threaten with the negative." All together, 24 different aspects of the community have been included and, as one result, several inquiries about possible business ventures have been received. But such things also serve to remind local residents of what they have right here at home.

One person who knows Chadron well describes it as a community that "knows its assets" and knows how to "emphasize its uniqueness." Its people are conservative and independent, products of a frontier heritage, no doubt. But they also know the value of cooperation, when that's what they need to do. "When there is a need," said one community leader, "we all work together and get it done." ■

"If you're going to do something, you might as well do it right." — comment from a community leader in Eustis

Eustis

The first thing you see when you drive into Eustis, Nebraska, population 460, is the school. A complex of several buildings, it houses a 1400-seat gymnasium and an Olympic-size indoor pool. Outside, a recently refurbished running track encircles the football field. A modern instruction wing houses an up-to-date library, classrooms and sound-insulated music room. Nearby sits an even newer industrial arts facility. All for 160 students, grades kindergarten through 12.

Driving through Eustis, which hugs a hill between Highway 23 and the creek south of town, you begin to see what "doing it right" means. Streets paved, lawns neatly trimmed, houses painted just right. Parks tucked here and there, with playground equipment or tennis courts.

. . . these are people for whom "frugal" is an inbred characteristic, good times or bad.

Downtown, across from the co-op elevator, a modern bank, just one year old, dominates the entry to the main street. Further up the street — toward the water tower — sits the new senior center, where more than half of the town's over-60 crowd stops each day for lunch. A modern American Legion hall nearby is just one of the facilities available for community events. There's still the school gymnasium and, oh yes, the new county fair building south of town. "Just follow the new road to the bridge and turn left." You find it across the street from the baseball field, the one with the new lights for turning night into day on warm summer evenings.

This is Eustis, a farm community, in a farm state, where farming is in trouble.

Times are tough here. When you ask, you hear phrases like "pulling in our belts." But you don't hear much, really. And, anyway, these are people for whom "frugal" is an inbred characteristic, good times or bad. "People don't talk about the economy except in general terms," observed one "recent" arrival, nine years a community resident. "When farmers have money they spend it, when they don't, they don't," said another resident.

Still, the quality of life hasn't changed drastically since the economy went sour, partly, say townspeople, because of the values associated with a strong German heritage. That heritage is visible everywhere — on the Wurst Haus and the Shootin' Haus, for example. It shows up at the annual Wurst Tag festival (Sausage Day is how it translates) when as many as 1000 people may turn out up for the all-day celebration.

> **"When it's time to work, they bust their tails together. When it's time to play, they let their hair down," observed a transplanted Irishman.**

"When it's time to work, they bust their tails together. When it's time to play, they let their hair down," observed a transplanted Irishman. In fact, less than half of the residents of the community (defined here — by everyone — as the town plus the surrounding countryside) are of German heritage. But then new residents, said one relative newcomer, are considered "cousins" shortly after their arrival. The heritage is a rallying point.

There's a strong sense of community in Eustis, a family orientation, good relations between young and old. One church did a study several years ago to find out how volunteers might help the elderly who lived alone. "We found out that an amazing network already existed — without any organization — to pick up the mail, do the shopping, get them to the beauty parlor and back," said a church leader.

That sense of community spills over into the town's personality in many ways, such as how decisions are made. Ideas get bandied about for a long time — in the service clubs, the social gatherings, the school events, on the street corners. Someone or some group gets the ball rolling, others put in their two cents worth, some money gets donated. An idea becomes a reality.

The "real meetings take place outside the structured meetings," one resident observed. "These things overlap. They are all together all the time . . . things get discussed . . . a consensus is reached."

The new track at the high school is an example. A group of community residents more or less decided that the dirt track wasn't good enough, so they searched around till they found a pile of cinders at a coal-burning power plant 80 miles away. They talked the plant into giving them what they could carry away, and 90 Eustis area farmers each made one trip, hauling a truckload back to the school. The same group raised the money for a curb around the track and the project was complete. No tax money, no public hearings, lots of community participation.

It takes a heavy dose of participation, not just one or two people doing all the pushing. "One person doesn't make or break a community."

It takes a heavy dose of participation, not just one or two people doing all the pushing. "One person doesn't make or break a community," one resident noted.

Leadership is, in fact, diffused, although the Chamber of Commerce or the Village Board is usually involved in major projects. "The Chamber does the planning and the Board does the approving," was one description of how roles are played out. Some projects, such as the new sewage treatment plan, were in planning for 10 or 20 years before they became a reality. A new water system is the next big project, and one community leader said projects of that magnitude always will require funding help from the state or federal government, because the little towns just can't afford them by themselves.

Smaller projects usually get done with a majority of community funds. A new ambulance was purchased entirely with donated money, and now 24 residents are certified EMTs. The Senior Center, a strong point of community pride, was built with local funds matching grant funds 2 to 1. Pledges, which were gathered in 60 days, were made for three years, but the mortgage was burned in two.

Even though it is common for youngsters to graduate from the high school, go to college and build a life elsewhere, some stay in town or return later and, in fact, there's a healthy contingent of young people. One of the churches, for example, displayed a demographic chart showing that the largest number of parishioners fell between the ages of 20 and 35. Most of the town's business owners are under 40, and several of them are in their twenties.

"It's hard to look 20 years ahead when you don't know what next year will bring," one business leader observed. "When you get scared, you don't do a whole lot of deep thinkin'."

Even with a younger generation of leaders, some people worry that planning for the future is taking a backseat to worry about the present. "It's hard to look 20 years ahead when you don't know what next year will bring," one business leader observed. "When you get scared, you don't do a whole lot of deep thinkin'."

Some people are worried that too many businesses are starting up without adequate capital. At the same time, however, farmers are spending more time with agronomists and CPAs, and they are becoming better marketers of their over-abundant crops. At the school, more and more children are on free or reduced- price lunches and cash flow is a problem for some families. But a nonprofit corporation was set up to build low-income housing units so that people who might otherwise have moved would have a reason to stay.

As in other small towns in the rural areas, economic diversity usually means that the farmers are planting three crops instead of two, or that they are raising some animals as well as feed grains. They'd like to attract a small industry to the town, though. A decent clothing store would be nice. There aren't any vacant business buildings, however, and even that is taken as a drawback to economic development because anyone moving in would have to build first.

Townspeople are motivated, in part, by what they see going on in some neighboring villages, where, they say, people have given up. They don't want that to happen here.

"No one has given up," said a business leader. "If we don't try it, we'll never better ourselves."

"Farmers are hurting," said one community leader. "When they hurt, we all hurt." Yet people are going to stick out the hard times and optimism is a built-in value, in quantity. "It's more or less their make-up," one resident observed.

"No one has given up," said a business leader. "If we don't try it, we'll never better ourselves." ■

"It takes more than money and location to keep a community alive."

"Stuff does get done."
— comments from community leaders in Geneva

Geneva

To grocery shoppers in many parts of Nebraska, the town of Geneva is the home of "Auto-Gro" tomatoes. Bright red and juicy, they appear on produce shelves year-round. They cost more, but they taste like real tomatoes, not those plastic-like things that are shipped in from Mexico during the winter months, when America's produce growers take a back seat to those south of the border.

A greenhouse product, Geneva tomatoes are one of the few examples of alternate farm produce in a state where traditional farming is hurting and, to no one's surprise, the farm communities are hurting as well.

A progressive bunch . . . the county's farmers are busy learning how to use computers to improve their management practices and how to exploit the commodity markets, rather than let the markets control them.

A town of 2400 people, barely 20 miles off Interstate 80, Geneva is in the heart of Nebraska's deep-well irrigation country, and the farmers of Fillmore County were among the nation's first to embrace modern irrigation practices. A progressive bunch now, as then, the county's farmers are busy learning how to use computers to improve their management practices and how to exploit the commodity markets, rather than let the markets control them.

The county's farmers have also tightened down, since the farm economy turned bad, and statistics made available by the University of Nebraska in Lincoln indicate that Geneva's retail sales in 1985 were only 72% of 1983's figures. Recent such statistics, which are studied intently by the community's leaders, indicate that things may be improving now, at least a little bit.

This is a town that has suffered a bank closing, like many other communities where farm loans constitute a significant part of any bank's portfolio. It's a town where two major industries — one producing mobile homes, the other irrigation systems — started and then failed in recent memory. Several stores on the town square have closed, including the computer store, a beauty shop and a men's clothing store. Eighty-six homes are for sale. The town competes with its neighbor, York, to the north, where the population is three times as large and where Interstate traffic buzzes by in a steady stream, 24 hours a day, spawning discount shopping centers and fast-food corners.

"There is a sense of hope of outlasting bad times," said a community leader.

"There's lots of confusion" about the economy, conceded one long-time resident, now a business leader. "There are those interested in seeing more jobs, more development. There's also lots of negativism, lots of despair among the businesses on Main Street."

But there is also, as one community leader put it, "lots of resiliency."

A close-knit community, one resident described the town's size as just right: "Small enough to know everyone, large enough for the basic services."

Here, though, the basic services are fairly comprehensive. For its size the town has more than its share of doctors, dentists, and lawyers. The Community Arts Council is unique, sponsoring a half dozen or more touring theatrical performances each year. A community education and recreation program is paid for by the school, the community, and the hometown bank, each picking up one-third of the costs. Three auto dealers are still in business, representing the major American car makers, and three — yes, three — farm implement dealers.

The word "excellent" always precedes "public schools," when townspeople tick off community strengths, which also include lots of churches and a country club.

Then there's the hospital, with its new million-dollar long- term care wing, a mobile medical van that travels throughout the county, lifeline telephone services for shut-ins and the house- cleaning service, also available county-wide. Aggressive and innovative (and operating in the black), the hospital found itself a while back with a large house-keeping staff and a steep decline in patient days. Looking at the situation as an opportunity, the institution decided to try selling house-cleaning services. Now six vans run hospital staff members all over the countryside, cleaning people's homes.

How would you describe the hospital? "Innovative in the face of acute-care decline," said one business leader. A prescription, perhaps, that might be rewritten for rural communities.

Geneva is one community where the public or service sector economy is strong, and that adds stability to payroll, a fact which does not escape business leaders. In addition to the school and the hospital, Geneva is the county seat. It is also home for the Youth Development Center, a state correctional facility. Fighting off two attempts by the state to close the center has reminded people that community pride, team spirit and local loyalty are important to survival.

> **Leadership is important here, and many people recognize it. "We're blessed with a few creative people and a good support network," one resident said.**

Community leaders say they've got to find ways to keep more young people in the town, but everybody also sees the area's sizable retired population as an asset. "Social Security checks are a regular, stable source of income," one leader said matter-of-factly.

While it has to compete with its bigger neighbor on the freeway to the north, being even that close to a major transportation route is considered an asset in Nebraska, and some economists have predicted that proximity to the Interstate highway will mean the difference between life and death for many Nebraska communities. Geneva is also a wealthy community — Fillmore County ranked 10th in per capita income among the state's 93 counties in a recent study.

Given its proximity to the highway and its relative economic strength, Geneva is a town that might rest on those assets. But it doesn't.

Leadership is important here, and many people recognize it. "We're blessed with a few creative people and a good support network," one resident said.

"Many people are very good at community organization," observed one community leader. "And lots of people are wearing lots of different hats."

As in many thriving communities, this town is also blessed with a generation of younger leaders and active participation of women in the leadership core. "Many people are very good at community organization," observed one community leader. "And lots of people are wearing lots of different hats."

Not that everything gets done without a struggle. One leader conceded that the community really has no master plan, and as a result there's a lot of tug and pull as projects get moved along. The bond issues for new school and hospital wings failed many times, were modified as a result of informal, "coffee-shop" negotiation, and finally passed. A downtown improvement project had to overcome considerable opposition and the county-wide senior handi-van program had to leap hurdles too. Now those things are a matter of pride, even for many who once fought them.

A key player in such initiatives is the Economic Development Corporation, now thinking county-wide. It is a catalyst for new ideas and projects, pushing people toward a consensus, raising money, getting commitments.

"There is a sense of hope of outlasting bad times," said a community leader. ■

> **"This corner of the earth smiles for me."**
> **— a quotation from Homer, seen in a store in downtown Wausa.**

Wausa

The main street of Wausa is, at first glance, typical of many small Nebraska towns. There is an impression of attention paid to detail, of everyday life that is orderly and predictable and, above all, an impression of solid, continuing history. The awareness of staying power is evident in the not-so-new but serviceable store fronts and the work clothes of their customers. This is a community that was founded in a determined fashion by Swedish immigrants about 100 years ago. It has survived because the attitudes of the founders have continued to the present. As one resident observed, "When our great-grandparents arrived here, they knew we'd be coming along someday. This town was built for their families and their descendants."

"I guess there's nothing really special about our town unless you think it's unusual these days for people to care about keeping things in good order."

Today, 650 people live in Wausa. Although a high percentage of the community is in the +60 age group, the elementary school classrooms are full and the population seems to be holding steady. One church member noted, "During the month of August, the community saw four deaths and five births."

People here believe that their town is an excellent example of a well-kept, friendly midwestern community. "I guess there's nothing really special about our town unless you think it's unusual these days for people to care about keeping things in good order," said a community leader.

Appearance is definitely seen as a strong point by community members and, although a few empty residences are in evidence, substandard or vacant housing does not seem to be a problem. The residential streets, mostly paved, are all well maintained. Homes show evidence of the owners' care and pride.

The people of Wausa are proud of the Community Hall (which can hold gatherings of 1200), the school facilities, the nursing home: physical evidence of the solidity and perseverance of the community. While community members might not discuss the appearance of their business district or the medical/dental clinic as symbols of the strength of the community, there can be no doubt that people do recognize the importance of these community assets to the future of their town. "We've always worked hard to keep health services in the town," said a community leader. "It makes all the difference in the number of people from other towns who come here for services and then stay to shop. We're very lucky that our professionals are committed to the community, too."

"We've always worked hard to keep health services in the town," said a community leader. "It makes all the difference in the number of people from other towns who come here for services and then stay to shop. We're very lucky that our professionals are committed to the community, too."

"Leadership here is seen as getting the right person to get the job done. There really isn't any one group that controls things," observed a lifetime resident. This pragmatic approach seems to be typical of Wausa.

The formal leadership of the community is focused on the Village Board and several organizations such as the Community Club (recently renamed from the Commercial Club in an effort to broaden membership beyond business interests) and a Women's Club. In Wausa, perhaps because of its small size, leadership roles seem to be quite fluid and change easily. The regulars at the local cafe, elected officials, officers of clubs and those in charge of community projects are often all the same people. Leadership is diffused but recognizable.

Conscious efforts are made by these leaders to include newcomers and younger community members in projects and tasks that serve as training ground for continued community service. While this type of mentoring behavior is described as "giving the young kids a turn at handling the jobs," it provides a smooth transition to new leadership for the community.

Existence of a younger leadership group, with an average age of less than 40, also indicates a positive trend among the downtown businesses in Wausa. Family-owned business which have two active generations at work represent many of main street businesses in the community. But there are also several business owners who have adopted Wausa as their own and plan to stay.

This group of young managers also forms the organized group working on economic development efforts. The group, referred to as an Economic Development Corporation, persisted in the effort, ultimately successful, to get a Community Development Block Grant to help a main street business expand. Currently, the group is using an innovative strategy to bring jobs to the town: they are searching for a small business to buy with local investors' money and relocate in Wausa.

"Our people are really cautious about spending money they don't have, but at the same time they are willing to invest in their businesses when they have a chance to make the town better," said one member of the Economic Development Corporation.

Located in the northeastern part of Nebraska, Wausa is 45 miles from Norfolk and 40 miles from Yankton, South Dakota. The trade area for Wausa business exceeds what might be predicted for the town. Local businesses, which offer sales and services in an area described as "from river to river," explain their sizable sales territory by affirming that they sell service, not products. "There are some towns nearby where I've sold nearly every family a product..," explained the owner of one family business.

The impact of changes in the agricultural economy is apparent in Wausa. Those dealing with the human service and counseling needs of the community will mention family stress and an increased expression of neighborliness as results of economic change. Library use has increased as magazine subscriptions are discontinued and fewer books are purchased by families, who are spending more carefully these days. A greater number of high school seniors have gone on to college in the last two years, a recognition that there may not be a future in family farming.

Despite a recognition of the difficulties of the farm economy and personal knowledge of friends and family adversely affected by the economic turmoil, community leaders in Wausa also recognize that their community is not as severely affected as other towns. Many leaders say that few local farmers had been tempted to expand beyond their capabilities; some mentioned that the soil in the area was too heavy to be improved by irrigation, so little or no debt was incurred to buy extensive irrigation systems; others said the frugal traditions of their Swedish heritage have kept Wausa residents from overspending their good sense.

"Our people are really cautious about spending money they don't have, but at the same time they are willing to invest in their businesses when they have a chance to make the town better," said one member of the Economic Development Corporation. Noted another, "We've had to be really persistent in getting help from state agencies and outside programs, but it's been worth all the hassle and paperwork." Even a small program can make a difference in a town this size.

"I think one of the things we do right in this town is to understand that to keep what we enjoy here — we have to keep up with modern changes and try to control what happens to our community."

It may be a combination of such a heritage that results in a vision of a future Wausa that preserves the present sense of small town security, cooperation, and common sense. While few if any Wausans want their community to be much changed in the future, there are groups within the community who do discuss the hopes and fears, threats and opportunities represented by the future.

"I'd like to see a few more small businesses, maybe more jobs that aren't dependent on agriculture but, you know, I wouldn't trade the small town atmosphere for a shopping center," said one leader. "I think one of the things we do right in this town is to understand that to keep what we enjoy here — we have to keep up with modern changes and try to control what happens to our community." ■

"We have to cooperate in order to survive."
— comment from a community leader in Florence

Florence

Residents of Florence, Missouri, can speak to the issue of small town survival. They live in a town which, to most people, barely exists at all. The population of Florence, while never large, is now only about 40, although the postmistress admits to "about 300" on the rural route.

Not too many years ago, Florence had a small but thriving downtown as well as some evidence of manufacturing in the form of a pottery factory. Times have indeed changed Florence. Today, the post office, two churches, a feed store and a grocery are the only businesses at the intersection that forms the center of town. The 40 or so community members are active, though. They recently banded together to begin a community crime watch program, and the volunteer fire department is alive and well.

> **The existence of Florence is part of a fascinating survival technique . . . the small towns in this area are confident that looking towards the hub of the wheel . . . helps each small town to survive on the rim.**

The struggle to stay visible and to keep some separate identity has been a difficult one for Florence, but the story of that struggle is inextricably bound to the story of the development of the area, rather than each isolated small town.

Florence is about 85 miles from Kansas City and only about 10 miles from Sedalia (population 21,000). The existence of Florence is part of a fascinating survival technique: rather than resisting the dominance of a "service center," the small towns in this area are confident that looking towards the hub of the wheel — in this case, Sedalia— helps each small town to survive on the rim. "We have to cooperate in order to survive," says one local leader, whose community service activities reflect the attitude of area consciousness that is so important to Florence and the other communities around Sedalia.

This active community resident serves on the School Board in Otterville (population 470), the Agriculture Committee of the Sedalia Chamber of Commerce, and has been president of the County Farm Bureau for ten years. "A few businesses, car dealers, for example, will admit that the rural areas are what keep Sedalia going," he points out, again emphasizing the importance of each section to the survival of the area.

This mix of manufacturing, services and agriculture operations provides both a base of job opportunities and a way to keep local dollars spent in the area.

The area economy seems to be diversified enough to keep both town and countryside living viable even if some businesses or factories shut down or move away. This mix of manufacturing, services and agriculture operations provides both a base of job opportunities and a way to keep local dollars spent in the area.

The Sedalia/Petis County Industrial Development Corporation recognizes the rural/urban connection. According to the head of the Development Corporation's Alternative Agriculture Co-operative, the Co-operative was created at the suggestion of the county commissioners. "Now we're working with 16 counties and even a tri-state growers association on one project. We serve our area but we work across political boundaries."

This community leader came to the area from southern Missouri where, he says, small towns compete strenuously against each other. He thinks that the spirit of cooperation in the Sedalia area may be an historical attitude. "Sedalia was the end of the Chisholm Trail... historically, it's always been the destination point, the hub of the population wheel here..."

The Alternative Agriculture Cooperative is remarkable in that its organization reflects an unusual awareness of the importance of agriculture to the area's economy on the part of a successful industrial development group. It is unusual for such an organization either to take notice of ag needs or to develop a program such as this. Typically, an industrial development group would focus entirely on recruitment activity exclusively rather than dealing with alternative agriculture.

The Alternative Agriculture Cooperative is remarkable in that its organization reflects an unusual awareness of the importance of agriculture to the area's economy on the part of a successful industrial development group.

The Co-op has been very successful in exploring new crops such as shiitake (shē ē tä'kā) mushrooms, amaranth, and marigolds, the latter grown for use as food colorings. The potential marigold crop may also prove a source of another potential enterprise: a local inventor has developed a new machine that can be used to harvest this alternative crop.

The small towns in the area surrounding Sedalia offer examples of vitality that might be surprising to many communities in similar circumstances. Otterville, population 470, recently convinced a young physician to begin practice in the town by remodeling a house and raising funds to help her purchase equipment.

Pleasantly astonished at the reception she has received in Otterville, the community's physician is pleased about her decision to locate here. "Not only did the town take care of the remodeling project, community volunteers took on office duties until an assistant was hired, the Chamber of Commerce raised money for equipment and local guys helped me move in!" she explains.

She likes being her own boss and the variety of patient problems she encounters. "This type of practice offers tremendous gratification because you really get to know patients, develop relationships with people," she adds. "Unfortunately, the office is already too small."

Perhaps the most amazing resource brought to bear on this young doctor's needs has been the connection to a college educated, full-time nanny. The doctor, who was six months pregnant when she began practicing in Otterville, admits that finding such a qualified caregiver in a small town amazed her. "She had been working as a nanny in New York but preferred to live in Otterville... without her, I couldn't do any of this."

The fact that a medical practice developed in a very short time reinforces the view ot area consciousness, as patients come from a variety of small towns as well as Sedalia. They drive as many as 40 miles for an office visit, and town boundaries appear to be meaningless.

Why this apparent disregard for boundaries? To explain, area residents believe that an important factor is the superlative vocational education system which has helped students from small schools take classes at Sedalia's State Fair Community College. Traveling to Sedalia by bus or car, students can participate in Summer Science Institutes as well as classes during the academic year. The program serves a three-county area and may have been a significant factor in developing a sense of community that reflects the area rather than just a specific town.

"People can choose to live in a very small town like Florence because the area has prospered and families aren't pressured to move away."

Strong schools with good test scores, little staff turnover, and frugal, well-planned operations are the mainstay of area communities. Community support and involvement come in many versions: the Otterville school received a new roof through 1800 hours of volunteer time as community members worked together on the building.

Standing on the main street of a town like Florence dramatizes the theme of area development through cooperation rather than competition. "The area has enough economic diversification to support households," comments a local leader who continues to work toward strengthening his community. "People can choose to live in a very small town like Florence because the area has prospered and families aren't pressured to move away."

Survival through cooperation has been the salvation of Florence, Otterville and similar towns. ■

"The biggest thing we have to sell is solitude. If we sell too much of it, we won't have it."
—comment from a Newtown resident

Newtown

Newtown has faced crisis before. A north central Missouri hamlet of less than 200, Newtown was virtually wiped off the map in 1899 by a spring tornado. Today, the challenge is something quite different. But the crisis is just as big, if not bigger.

"I wish I could tell you that Newtown is going to survive," says one area farmer and concerned community leader. "The vote is still out."

But community pride and commitment to the area run deep here...as deep as the roots put down years ago by their ancestors. One local leader, whose great-grandfather homesteaded nearby before the Civil War, heads the newly formed Newtown-Harris Community Development Association...a group he fondly calls the "dreamers and doers."

"I wish I could tell you that Newtown is going to survive," says one area farmer and concerned community leader. "The vote is still out."

In 1899, within hours after the tornado flattened Newtown, neighbors from miles around were headed into the community, ready to start cleaning up and rebuilding.

That spirit is still alive today, and it is part of what motivates community leaders to work harder to try to make sure the community is alive tomorrow.

Located on the north edge of Missouri's poorest county, Newtown is surrounded by the beautiful countryside of the Green Hills area, a several-county region with rolling hills, deep woods, and meandering streams.

The Community Development Association, which encompasses Harris, five miles south, is focusing on area strengths, looking for opportunities to diversify the economy and maintain a quality of life that area residents boast about.

The Development Association was founded by area leaders who got fired up at a Pioneer Hi-Bred Search for Solutions Conference. As many as 80 local residents have been attracted to the Association's monthly meetings. One of the group's first steps was to rip down the city limit signs, to underscore the notion that the "community" was not defined by the town boundaries.

The Association has also established several task forces, focusing on tourism, wholesale/retail potential, and day care. A community survey is underway, written with the assistance of the area Cooperative Extension agent who specializes in rural community development.

For a town of its size, Newtown has an active business and community life. (Although the signs at each end of town disagreed on the official population count, local consensus says Newtown has about 170 residents.)

One of the Association's first steps was to rip down the city limit signs, to underscore the notion that the "community" was not defined by the town boundaries.

A bank, cafe, grocery store, feed store, service station and barber shop line the main street. Two churches and the Newtown-Harris School, with 92 students in kindergarten through 12th grade, also sit next to the highway through town. Other local businesses include two beauty parlors, a video store, a hardware store, liquor store, and a craft shop. A major rail line runs a dozen freight trains through town each day.

Not far away, in Harris, is another grocer, a gas station and the rural fire department, a major source of local pride, especially since its rating has just been improved.

Consolidation of the Harris and Newtown schools, along with several small country schoolhouses, was a tooth-and-nail battle that area residents still talk about, even though it occurred nearly 40 years ago. Remnants of the feud are still visible today, says one local leader, "kinda like the Hatfields and McCoys," although there is now more concern that the Newtown-Harris school might be gobbled up by an even larger district from one of the area's bigger towns.

That fear has been lessened somewhat by the skyrocketing scores of Newtown-Harris students on the Missouri Mastery and Achievement Tests, the state's mandatory statewide assessment program. The 1988 "Academic Progress Report" issued by the state's education department showed that local students' scores increased by as much as 22% in math and science.

A school superintendent who stayed just two years before she left to complete her doctorate "turned the whole process around," said a local leader, who has a continuing interest in the school system. His wife, who is the elementary principal and learning disabilities specialist, is also a member of the Governor's Commission on Educational Excellence, which monitors the state's assessment program.

Eighty to ninety percent of the school's graduates attend college or a vocational school after they graduate, and no one can remember when a student last dropped out.

During the superintendent's tenure, a Future Farmers of America chapter was established, the entire vocational agriculture program was improved, and the school began to compete successfully for a variety of state incentive and grant programs. Eighty to ninety percent of the school's graduates attend college or a vocational school after they graduate, and no one can remember when a student last dropped out.

The school has a complete computer literacy curriculum for grades five through 12, and an up-to-date, technology-oriented vocational program.

The new superintendent, who built a home in the community as a show of faith in the school's future, says he's impressed with the local commitment to high quality education, and especially the willingness of local residents to tax themselves to make sure education remains a community strength.

"This community is willing to tax itself higher than any other school in Missouri to maintain its school," noted the superintendent, who says he left a larger district in Missouri to "get away from the rat race" of the bigger town.

Cost per pupil is nearly double the state average, but the education it buys may be as good as that found in the best private schools: the teacher-student ratio is only 6 to 1.

> **"This community is willing to tax itself higher than any other school in Missouri to maintain its school," noted the school's superintendent.**

Still, according to school officials, the school "has some tough days ahead" because its enrollment is so small, and there's little sign today that it will grow significantly. With 10 years to go before retirement, the school superintendent says he plans to spend those years "telling the story that this school district has the right to survive."

Other area strengths include a progressive Rural Electric Cooperative, which recently gave each of the county's schools a satellite reception dish; good natural cover for game birds and deer (last year's deer hunters' breakfast on opening day brought in nearly $1400 for the fire department); an active cottage industry producing a variety of crafts, and the SOO rail line.

Because of the railroad, and Newtown's proximity to Iowa cornfields, community leaders are pushing the idea of the state locating a gasohol plant in the community. "Right now it's a pipedream," admits one local leader, but the Rural Electric Co-op has put up the money for an engineering feasibility study and the Missouri Cornproducers have already been approached with the idea.

On a considerably smaller scale, the Community Development Association is also trying to figure out how to keep a grocery store open after 6 p.m. and studying options for serving an evening meal in the local cafe, now open only for breakfast and lunch.

The grocery store owner in Harris, who is also the vice president of the Development Association, is a local business leader who believes in this area and continues to work to keep it strong. He advertises in the County Shopper newspaper and tries to keep his prices competitive.

After a stint in the Air Force and a career in the airline industry, this hometown businessman moved back to Harris. He likes the fact that you can raise a family here without many of the worries associated with child-rearing in a bigger town. But he does worry about the decline in population and, especially, the increasing age of the area's residents.

"When a young person moves away, there is a chance you can draw him back. When an old person dies, he's gone."

> **"Our strength is our attitude . . . We want to keep Newtown, as opposed to a ghost town."**

Another of those young people who grew up in the area, moved away for a time, and then came back is the industrial arts teacher for the junior and senior high school.

This young teacher hopes that the Community Development Association will help focus local leadership energies, identifying projects that will keep momentum up and enthusiasm high. "Our strength is our attitude," he said. "We want to keep Newtown, as opposed to a ghost town."

Another teacher at the Newtown-Harris school grew up in a different part of the state. She accepted a teaching position here, married a local farmer and is now one of the community's biggest promoters.

"You feel welcomed here," she says. "It's like a big family."

The president of the Citizens State Bank also has positive things to say about this area. He believes that the friendly, caring attitude is one of the biggest strengths of the Newtown-Harris community.

"If anyone has any problem, the whole community comes together to help those people...whether it's illness, a fire, or just bad luck," he says.

"It makes me proud of our people and our community."

That sense of responsibility for others, a sensitivity for those who are facing difficulties, is what rebuilt Newtown after the tornado nearly 90 years ago. It may be what keeps Newtown alive today.

"If anyone has any problem, the whole community comes together to help those people . . . whether it's illness, a fire, or just bad luck."

But Newtown was never a big place, its population probably no larger than 500 at its peak. No one who wants it to survive is planning on it becoming a booming metropolis, preferring to find a way to keep it alive with its current quality of life intact.

The home economics teacher, put it this way:

"The biggest thing we have to sell is solitude. If we sell too much of it, we won't have it." ■

"The community that resists change dies."
—comment from a community leader in St. Paris

St. Paris

On the surface, St. Paris, Ohio (Pop. 1500), looks like hundreds of other small midwestern farm towns...quiet and pleasant...a nice town to drive through on an autumn Sunday afternoon.

But underneath that traditional exterior, a thriving entrepreneurial spirit breeds new businesses with an aggressiveness that can be felt from the coffee shop just off Main Street to the farms outside of town.

Like many small towns in west central Ohio, St. Paris enjoys a diverse economic base that would be the envy of many rural communities in other areas.

> **Underneath that traditional exterior, a thriving entrepreneurial spirit breeds new businesses with a aggressiveness that can be felt from the coffee shop just off Main Street to the farms outside of town.**

A huge Navistar truck plant, about 20 miles away, employs thousands within its giant factory compound. Just outside of St. Paris, a parts supplier for a nearby Honda auto plant employs 300 work-ethic-happy farm kids. Its employment force will soon grow to 450, an expansion financed in part through local tax abatements, community development block grant funds, and five years' forgiveness on sewer and water bills.

Still, the striking feature is the explosion in — and success of — new business ventures that spring up like newly planted corn, nurtured along carefully by local residents who have learned how to make St. Paris a hot spot of entrepreneurial success.

Take, for example, the owner of Infotel, an electronic equipment distribution warehouse. Trained as a veterinarian, this young businessman's warehouse moves 10,000 computer printers a month — an impressive market share of all U.S. sales — in and out of Infotel's expanding warehouse along Highway 36 west of St. Paris.

Raised on a farm close by, this area entrepreneur started a riding stable in college, then went on to become a vet. But he never really practiced animal medicine, acting instead on business instincts that would be the envy of any MBA graduate.

In six years his electronics business has grown from a part-time home-based business with one small computer into a beehive of telemarketing and nationwide computer printer distribution, most of it handled by UPS semi-trailer trucks that back up to Infotel's warehouse each morning and each afternoon, first unloading new inventory and then returning to haul away the day's sales.

Now employing more than 50 people from nearby towns and farms, the firm is growing at a rate of 250 percent per year.

> **"A big help is just being in a rural environment. The work ethic . . . that's an important part of it. It's a big strength in rural America."**

"It's hard to get something like this off the ground," admits this small town entrepreneur, his quiet manner cloaking a super-charged ambition that drives the firm's mind-boggling record of marketing success. "We do two or three things really well," he says, pointing to price, quick shipment, and expert sales support as keys to the firm's growth.

"The big void in rural America," continues Infotel's owner, "is marketing." "What's my definition of business?" he asks himself aloud. "A marketing war and an efficiency contest," he answers.

Although the auto parts manufacturer nearby has asked for and received community concessions, first for locating there and now for expanding, Infotel's owner has not sought tax incentives or utility bill waivers. "I haven't asked for any help," he says, but adds: "A big help is just being in a rural environment. The work ethic...that's an important part of it. It's a big strength in rural America."

Location, he adds, has not been a handicap.

His former business partner in the computer printer business is another young businessman who still works the family farm outside of St. Paris while he's dreaming up new businesses.

Both men are still in business together to some degree, as co-owners of Heart-to-Heart, a computer dating game sold to high schools nationwide as a Valentine's Day fund-raiser for school clubs. This business, which also started on a small computer in one man's basement, now thrives on a 200,000 volume mail order marketing scheme.

> **"This area appeals to me . . . I like the quality of life here. And the overhead is less."**

While Infotel's business volume is currently keeping its owner busy, his partner in Heart-to-Heart is also off on a new venture. His recently created graphics business is operating out of a storefront in downtown St. Paris, where high quality screen-printing is the specialty. Its owner says he's learning quality control doing T-shirts for local high school events. Eventually, he says, he'll invest in better equipment, find a specialized vertical market, and then sell aggressively to that market coast to coast.

"This area appeals to me," explains the young businessman, who attended college at a state university before he moved back home. "I like the quality of life here. And the overhead is less."

These community business leaders are just two of the breed of highly successful, mostly young, entrepreneurs who call St. Paris home. Most of them own one, two, perhaps three businesses that they are managing successfully. Many of them still farm a few acres, reluctant to give up their attachment to the soil that their fathers and grandfathers worked before them.

Product and market specialization, with an emphasis on sales via mail order to similar markets nationwide, is a recurring theme among St. Paris area entrepreneurs.

Not all businesses in St. Paris have been developed by long time residents of the community, however. One relative newcomer, who moved to St. Paris three years ago from nearby Dayton, says he bought land here because "it was less expensive." He now grows what his neighbors fondly call "Gourmet Hay," a high-quality alfalfa that he ships by the semi load to horse lovers nationwide.

What's different about his hay vs. someone else's, he explains, is that "I market it uniquely," through ads in nationwide horse owners' magazines. He recently opened a tack shop in another small town nearby, selling Australian riding equipment to passers-by and, of course, by mail order...nationwide. He also sells the Wet Jet, a sort-of motorcycle on water, in three states for the waterbike's Missouri-based manufacturer.

Another resident of St. Paris with multiple business interests is the local Pioneer seed corn dealer. Like both his dad and his father-in-law, this business leader is a Pioneer representative, but he continues to work at other business ventures such as: real estate, heating and air-conditioning installation and service, quarter horse breeding and, just to keep in practice, a little farming, too.

Along with his business interests, this active community leader also serves on the county school board and a new county-wide economic development committee. He is proud of the town's ability to encourage new business development, but he's concerned, too, about the broader community impact when young people are that busy making a living.

"Twenty years ago, aggressive young people were investing in building a community. Today, we're more into investing in ourselves," said one local resident. "It's kinda scary."

"They don't have time to sit down," he says, let alone "time to work on community boards, church boards, etc."

Other residents agree. "Twenty years ago, aggressive young people were investing in building a community. Today, we're more into investing in ourselves," said one local resident. "It's kinda scary."

A big help in keeping the town on its feet though, according to the St. Paris banker, has been the Honda parts supplier, an independent company known as KTH. However, he says he does worry about over-dependence on one big employer. "We're dependent on Honda's profitability," he admits. "Very dependent. Too dependent."

> **"... St. Paris should think about developing the kind of strategic plan that a business would, projecting several years into the future, answering such questions as 'where do we want to be in the year 2000'."**

The town may be doing well, he continues, in part because the farm crisis "made farmers into better managers, bankers into better loan officers." Now, he adds, St. Paris should think about developing the kind of strategic plan that a business would, projecting several years into the future, answering such questions as "where do we want to be in the year 2000."

The United Methodist rural chaplain for the Ohio Council of Churches, who has seen many communities work through changes, says he senses a willingness in St. Paris and other thriving towns to find opportunity amidst change. He points to the fact that one Ohio community, with a sizable population of Japanese families who work as managers in the Honda plant, started a Saturday school program taught by Japanese-speaking teachers to satisfy the cultural needs of the new residents who were used to six-day-a-week public schools, instead of five.

"The community that resists change dies," he says. "We must be experimental. We must accept the psychological (as well as the economic) shifts." ■

"We're very specific about what we're good at ."
— comment from a hospital administrator in Clifton

Clifton

Passengers on Amtrak's "City of New Orleans" could blink and just about miss Clifton, Illinois, as the train made famous by Arlo Guthrie's folk song whistles through this farm town south of Chicago.

In big-city terms, maybe Clifton isn't much: Its 1300 residents live pretty quiet and, as one resident puts it, "laid back lives." The town has no industry to speak of, and its population, like that of many other small towns in America's Heartland, is growing older. What Clifton has, however, can't be bought, and that is a quality of life that keeps attracting new residents, many of them seeking a better place to raise their children or a quiet, affordable neighborhood outside of the city.

"We've got a lot of things going for us," says a 30-year-old Clifton native who moved back to town to take over the business his grandfather started 40 years ago.

What Clifton has can't be bought – a quality of life that keeps atttracting new residents . . .

On the list of pluses, say this and other community leaders, are a good school system, the municipal swimming pool, a new community building, tennis courts, three restaurants, a dental clinic, and several new or expanding businesses. One is the hardware store that this young business owner just opened next to his heating and air-conditioning service company.

Then there's the Clifton Community Hospital, a source of community pride that was founded in 1955 by a local physician who put the first hospital beds in the second floor of his own home.

Today the hospital is a modern, 33-bed facility that is staffed by eight main admitting physicians and 28 consulting practitioners, plus the four podiatrists who have made Clifton the area's center for foot surgeries.

"We may be the smallest community in Illinois with a hospital," says the hospital's director, who was the state's youngest hospital administrator when she was hired. "I know we're one of the few (rural hospitals) that is financially solvent."

That couldn't be said more than a decade ago when the hospital, housed in an old and outdated structure, was given to the community by its private owner. Clifton residents decided the hospital was an asset worth saving, and they raised $300,000 "in some $10,000 and $20,000 pledges from area farmers, but a lot of $10 donations, too," according to a local leader, who has chaired the hospital board since 1979.

Focusing on the most timely priorities may be one key to the strength of the area.

Those pledges secured a $1.6 million loan from the Farmers Home Administration, and a new building was constructed in the center of town. Today, the up-to-date health care center has 60 employees, most of whom live in Clifton and the two neighboring towns just four miles in either direction.

Focusing on sound business practices and good marketing sense, the hospital has become the medical center for a large area, attracting patients from neighboring farm communities, as well as the cities.

"We're very specific about what we're good at, and what we're not," emphasizes the hospital's administrator. "We can't be everything to everybody."

With that in mind, the hospital has become expert at diagnosis, pediatrics, senior care, minor surgeries – a "general family hospital."

Focusing on the most timely priorities may be one key to the strengths of this area, where a county as large as Rhode Island is dotted with small towns that are learning to cooperate as they face new challenges.

"We're pulling people together," say a Clifton farmer who chairs the county board and works tirelessly to help expand the area's economy. "As we get some success, people are able to overlook (the bad feelings about) who won the ball game way back when."

That cooperative spirit shows up in a variety of ways, from the food pantry run by all the churches in the school district to the efforts of business owners to avoid duplicating what can be bought in a neighboring community.

Cooperation is also working inside town boundaries. In Clifton, that spirit has revitalized the town's business association, which counts among its 20 members most of the town's employers.

Last year, the association noticed that senior citizens who came to town to get their mail had stopped their practice of wandering through the stores on Main Street. The problem was that the Post Office had been moved a block away and sidewalks from the new site back toward the town's shops were substandard.

So the business owners dug into their own pockets, negotiated with local suppliers, and paid for new sidewalks themselves. Those sidewalks will also make it easier for family members visiting the hospital to get to a Main Street cafe for lunch or to the gift shop just opened by one of the growing number of downtown business owners.

The business association, says a local entrepreneur, is putting together a brochure on Clifton and is also planning to erect a community information sign in the town park, where passers-by can study a town map and a schedule of community celebrations.

Business owners dug into their own pockets . . . and paid for new sidewalks themselves.

That same "can-do" attitude is evident at the old Chevy garage, where four businesses occupy space that sat empty after the dealership closed its doors. One of the occupants is Central Body Repair, which specializes in semi-truck service, attracting regular customers from a 60-mile radius that includes the Chicago suburbs to the north and Champaign to the south.

The body shop is owned by a husband and wife team, who developed the building and moved their business into town from the country in the process. "We moved the body shop to town because we had a chance to buy this building," say the owners. "Clifton is a nice town. It's quiet and clean, and it has good access to Interstate 57."

"The move has been very good for us," they note, explaining that their expanded business has nine employees and the once-vacant building also is home to three new employers. "It was a wise decision."

As varied as Clifton's businesses may be, the community remains dependent on a fickle farm economy, which has been on a roller-coaster ride since the early 1970s.

Yet one farmer, who also owns real estate and auctioneering businesses, still believes that Clifton's long-term prospects are bright, as an attractive haven for people escaping urban stress.

> **". . . We also need to get people to think about the long pull."**

"We're holding our own," he says. "We have an excellent hospital, an excellent school, few drug problems. Basically, we've got rural people who know how to work. But we need more industry."

Under the guidance of a group of young leaders who were recruited to serve on the Iroquois County board, the county can advertise several recent success stories in industrial expansion.

"I know we're still not moving fast enough," says the director of the county's industrial development association. "The little towns want to see action quicker. But we also need to get people to think about the long pull."

In Clifton, the "long pull" is maintaining a quality of life attractive enough to keep enticing new residents. One recent success story is told by the young business owner whose hardware store put in a line of house paint that was new to the community.

"The truck driver for the paint company is actively looking for a home to buy here after just two visits," he says. "He brought his wife back with him and, as soon as they find the right house, they're going to move." ■

"We're really fortunate to have a large group of young, committed leaders in our town."
—comment from a Coopersville official

Coopersville

While most small towns in America are threatened by population decline, in Coopersville, Michigan, the town's leaders face the opposite problem. Here farming and urban expansion are "on a collision course," as one area farmer puts it, and the community's leaders are working overtime to maintain a high quality of life *and* enjoy the benefits of population growth.

"We're really fortunate to have a large group of young, committed leaders in our town," says Coopersville's 32-year-old mayor. "Our biggest challenge is moving into the future while keeping the small town qualities that have made our community attractive."

"Our biggest challenge is moving into the future while keeping the small town qualities that have made our community attractive."

A community of 3200, Coopersville is an old logging town located about halfway between Grand Rapids, a rapidly growing city of nearly one half million, and Lake Michigan, with its diverse recreation attractions.

While most of America's rural communities are struggling to hang on to the population they have, Coopersville is growing steadily, as it has for nearly 40 years. And, while many small towns are learning to deal with a rapidly aging population, the average age here is just 34 years.

Location means a lot to Coopersville, situated in the center of Michigan's fastest growing county. But location isn't the only factor in this community's success.

"My first impression of Coopersville was so positive," says one resident, who moved here with her husband about 10 years ago. "The trees and the little creek at the entrance to town made a lasting impression on me." The couple, who moved from Detroit, now own an insurance agency in town.

The community also has a reputation as a place where people actively cooperate. One example is the Area Emergency Fund, established a few years back to help one family overcome the burden of hospital costs after a tragic accident. Now, the Fund is a resource for any family in need of help.

The school and the community have an unusually close relationship which has produced, among other benefits, a five-year master plan for city-school district collaboration in recreational facilities and programs. The plans calls for a portion of the 95-acre school site to be developed as a family recreation and sports complex, linking existing parks with a trail system and increasing year-round use.

An ambitious community education program, staffed by several school employees, makes school buildings highly accessible to the community's adults. One adult education group, known as the "Old Kids," is an active seniors class that, in addition to sponsoring a choir, has written three local histories and plans periodic bus tours to historic sites. Other programs offer career improvement and enrichment courses to adults. The community education program has been so successful that the school board has kept it going despite state cutbacks.

Coopersville's growth is both guarded and promoted by the Chamber of Commerce.

Persistence is another community virtue — the local historical society submitted three grant requests before the Michigan Equity Fund agreed to support restoration of the Inter-Urban Depot, which was once served by an electric railway that ran from Grand Rapids toward Lake Michigan.

Coopersville's growth is both guarded and promoted by the area Chamber of Commerce, which was reorganized after its membership fell to less than 20 in 1983. "The first task was to focus on making the Chamber a tangible and important part of community life," says a former Coopersville school superintendent who now serves as the Chamber's volunteer executive director.

Today, with 120 active members, a newsletter, and an energetic core of business leaders, the Chamber has helped to increase business activity downtown, where several new businesses are housed in restored buildings.

One of those business leaders is a local entrepreneur who bought and restored part of an old hotel for her dress shop. "My long-range plan is to restore all the floors and make the entire building an active part of downtown," she says. "Right now, I'm only using the first floor, but there's lots of opportunity if you can think long term and you're willing to work hard."

Willingness to work hard is embedded in the local ethic, as employers both large and small have discovered.

Another business owner moved to Coopersville 18 months ago, in part because he liked the lifestyle here. But he also knew he could hire the kind of workers he wanted in the local labor force. Now, with five employees, his specialized tool and die business focuses on checking manufactured products to maintain the extraordinary accuracy demanded in today's global markets.

"I really couldn't make a go of a business if I didn't have employees who are highly dependable and productive. That can make or break an entrepreneur."

"In my situation," he says, "I really couldn't make a go of a business if I didn't have employees who are highly dependable and productive. That can make or break an entrepreneur."

That same worker dependability is an asset for large employers as well, such as the Rochester Products plant, which supplies fuel injectors for about 85% of GM's cars and for other auto manufacturers worldwide.

A variety of homegrown factories — producing everything from custom millwork to mailboxes — mixes nicely, at least for the moment, with a healthy and diverse agricultural economy in a community where farming is still considered the economic underpinning.

Ottowa County produces, among other things, more apples than most other Michigan counties, and its dairy herds produce more milk today than they did a decade ago. Corn and soybeans are still raised between healthy stands of tall hardwoods, and raising hogs and turkeys are also major farming operations.

Coopersville's leaders are positive about growth, but they are not naive about the problems that accompany increasing population.

Farmers in the county are protected from creeping urban expansion by the tight reins of the township's planning and zoning board, which grants permits to build houses in the countryside only by exception...with few exceptions granted.

That's working for now. Yet a young dairy farmer who is active in the community and school says he believes urban expansion and farming are "on a collision course" headed for a crisis sometime in the future.

He and other area farmers who stop by a highway cafe for a cup of coffee agree that urban life and agriculture will face some tough questions ahead if Coopersville's assets continue to attract new people from the larger towns in both directions.

Coopersville's leaders are positive about growth, but they are not naive about the problems that accompany increasing population. Some of the challenges of the future include concerns over water quality and quantity and the shortage of housing — problems that require strategic thinking at its best.

Coopersville is meeting those challenges through increased citizen involvement, better long-range planning, and the wisdom to build on community strengths.

"We have agriculture, manufacturing, and retail business in a pretty good combination right now," says Coopersville's young mayor. If Coopersville is as successful in balancing those forces in the future as it has been in the past, it will maintain the qualities that make it attractive to both the old-timers and the new residents, as well. ■

> **"You can't solve it all alone but together we can, not just today, but everyday."**
> **— comment from a community leader in Jackson**

Jackson

When the Unisys Corporation announced on a cold December day that it was closing its computer plant in Jackson, Minnesota, the announcement sent a shock wave through the community. "There was lots of doom and gloom," says one local businessman who owns a publishing company in Jackson and heads the 20-year-old industrial development group here.

Yet a year later, on the first anniversary of the plant closing announcement, this town of 3700 held a celebration. In just 12 months, it had recovered from the blow that followed the loss of 300 good-paying jobs, and it had helped to replace those jobs — and more — through new industries, plant expansions, and new business start-ups.

When the Unisys Corporation announced on a cold December day that it was closing its computer plant in Jackson, Minnesota, the announcement sent a shock wave through the community.

With the Unisys plant, which at its height employed 800, this southwestern Minnesota community had become complacent, say local leaders as they look back on those times.

"Things were rolling pretty good," says the new president of the Jackson Chamber of Commerce, who is also director of the area's technical college campus. "We probably got lulled to sleep a little bit."

When the plant closing was announced, he says, the complacency disappeared overnight, replaced by a new leadership aggressiveness that has revitalized the town's image of itself.

"We were laying on the mat," says the town's mayor, a veterinarian who moved to Jackson in the early '70s. "We had to decide either to get up and fight or get counted out."

"Everyone was groping when Unisys made its announcement," admits the manager of the rural electric cooperative. But then the industrial development board got going, and things began to get back on track.

First, the development board asked Unisys to change its mind. When that didn't work, the board tried to find another manufacturer to buy the building and save the jobs. Finally, the development board members decided they would have to create a solution themselves, and they spent "countless hours" doing the legwork and research to overcome the crisis.

"We were laying on the mat. We had to decide either to get up and fight or get counted out."

"At the time a lot of us were overburdened," says the head of the industrial development group, who moved to Jackson five years ago when he saw an opportunity in the printing business. He admits spending a lot of time on the project as well as hundreds of dollars out of his pocket on telephone bills, and he admits that his business suffered.

But, he says, the celebration a year later showed what a community can do if it works hard and gets all the help it can.

What Jackson did, mainly, was to refuse to quit.

When it became clear that Unisys wasn't going to reopen the plant, and when no other buyer appeared immediately on the horizon, Jackson's business and industry leaders started negotiating to buy the building, situated in an industrial park created 20 years earlier to attract the plant in the first place!

The building and all its equipment, worth an estimated $1.5 million, eventually was sold to the community for less than $200,000, and somehow the development board even got Unisys to come up with a cash grant that the town used as a down payment to buy the building and grounds.

When the industrial board heard that a manufacturer of fiber glass truck and utility bodies was looking for a place to expand, board members went to work, put together a financing package with state help and negotiated job training assistance for the plant's work force. That company, Astoria Industries, now occupies the former computer plant.

Across the road at the AgChem manufacturing plant, a mammoth, five-acre building has just been completed. It houses manufacturing and assembly operations for the enormous big-wheel tractors that are sold for fertilizer and chemical application throughout North America and abroad.

After being surprised by the Unisys decision, development board members now visit local businesses on a regular basis, asking what plans they have, what the town can do if changes are on the drawing board.

The $8 million expansion project was also financed, in part, with city and state assistance.

"This community wants us to be here and we like it here," says the AgChem plant manager. "When the word gets out that you are thinking about expanding, they come out of the woodwork" to find out what needs doing. The company had an offer from another state, which would have given it a plant to move into. But in Jackson, "we had the total support of every government agency involved, also the townspeople in general. When all that got on the table, the decision was made. This was the place we wanted to be."

The manager of Pioneer Hi-Bred's soybean production plant in Jackson confirms that the development board no longer waits to see what local employers' plans are. After being surprised by the Unisys decision, development board members now visit local businesses on a regular basis, asking what plans they have, what the town can do if changes are on the drawing board.

When the Pioneer Hi-Bred plant manager told them that his company planned to double the size of its Jackson warehouse, "the development people were out in a flash, offering help." Pioneer wasn't asking for financial assistance for its expansion, he notes, but he still felt good about the attitude.

The industrial board is tuned into "jobs, jobs, jobs," says the board's president, and it doesn't let roadblocks stand in the way. Prospective employers are "courted," he says. "If they even breathe it, we try to provide it." Meetings to brainstorm possible solutions are common.

Not everything works.

"We've had some successes, we've had some failures," says the manager of Federal Rural Electric. Most importantly, he says, "we've had some extremely good teamwork come out of our crisis."

There's a new attitude in Jackson . . . and that attitude says, "We'll do it."

That teamwork is beginning to turn more attention toward locally owned businesses and especially retail, which is considered a weakness. More retail shopping options downtown would be good for the economy, attracting more dollars from the visitors who are drawn to the nightly summer races at the county speedway and keeping more college business in town.

But retail will also have to keep up with today's highly changing consumer interests and Walmart-style competition. The owner of the Coast-to-Coast store expanded his business into the old City Hall with encouragement from the City Council. He is busy redefining small town retail with a one-of-a-kind hardware store. His operation now includes renting videos, handling UPS shipments, selling boats and motors, and carrying sports clothing.

There's a new attitude in Jackson, he says, and that attitude says, "We'll do it."

Community leadership, which is undergoing transition to a younger generation, is gaining confidence. Now, say leaders young and old, the community can put up with the naysayers and withstand community controversy.

The Unisys plant closing and the crisis that followed changed the way community leaders behave. The industrial development board now meets twice weekly, once to talk about what's on the agenda for the future, once to evaluate how they're doing today.

Community volunteers who wore themselves thin replacing the jobs that were lost when the plant closed, realized they couldn't continue at that pace on their own, so they convinced the city to hire a full-time professional. Now Jackson employs an economic development coordinator who serves as the staff member for both city initiatives and the industrial group.

> **"The crisis led to better cooperation," says one local banker. As a result, "success has snowballed and generated new enthusiasm."**

"The crisis led to better cooperation," says one local banker. As a result, "success has snowballed and generated new enthusiasm."

The town continues to take advantage of whatever help is available, maintaining contact with area legislators, state agencies and foundations, and participating in rural leadership programs whenever they are available. The town's leadership has replaced complacency with aggressiveness and a new willingness to take risks.

The most important lesson from the plant closing crisis may be that community leaders need to keep talking, working together, taking a team approach to problem solving. According to Jackson's economic development coordinator, "You can't solve it all alone."

"But," she adds, "together we can, not just today, but everyday." ■

"It's the people that make things happen. You get shot down, but you don't give up."
—comment from a businessman in Larimore

Larimore

Like many other small towns that dot America's rural landscape, Larimore, North Dakota, is in a state of transition. Once a bustling rail hub and commercial center, Larimore, population 1500, has become a bedroom community. According to the town's mayor, 40% of Larimore's citizens drive to work each day at the nearby Air Force Base or into Grand Forks, 30 miles away.

A farm community nestled into the rich Red River Valley, Larimore is struggling to redefine itself and its future, and it is still a bit uncertain about what that future will be.

"We're still kind of like a boat with no rudder," says the president of the revitalized Community and Commercial Club. "We're not in danger of sinking. We're still afloat. But there's no direction yet."

"We're still kind of like a boat with no rudder," says the president of the revitalized Community and Commercial Club. "We're not in danger of sinking. We're still afloat. But there's no direction yet."

The Commercial Club's president, a 31-year-old farmer, is one of a small group of new community leaders who are hard at work, trying to put spark into community life and pushing the town to take a new look at itself.

Another member of the group is the manager of an auto parts store who serves on the Park Board. "Attitudes are changing now," says the local businessman, and you hear fewer "it-won't-work" comments. "New people are getting involved. We're just out doing things." These are just two of the new breed of leaders in Larimore.

For the young head of the Community and Commercial Club, who took over the family farm at the age of 21 and then, as he says, "crammed four years of college into seven," community leadership has become a driving passion. He still works the family's 1300-acre farm southwest of Larimore and he sells Pioneer seed too, but what he really likes is volunteering his time to improve the Larimore community.

His community orientation started in '83 when he was elected to the board of the local co-op elevator. The elevator was $350,000 in debt and about to go under. Board members "started knocking on doors," raised $170,000 by selling $1000 certificates, borrowed the rest, and "brought it back from the brink."

The new manager, hired to get the elevator's operations back on track, says that the elevator success story is a good example of what it takes to make a difference. It's the people that make things happen, he adds. "You get shot down, but you don't give up."

People are making things happen in Larimore. One energetic new group is the Larimore Community Entertainers, a community club that produces choral concerts and Broadway-style musicals. In the last four years, they've presented such shows as Cinderella, Showboat and Oliver in the main street theater being renovated by two brothers, who retired in Larimore after successful off-Broadway careers. The musical Oliver had a cast of 70, and all four performances were sold out.

In 1983, the co-op elevator was $350,000 in debt and about to go under. Board members raised $170,000 by selling $1000 certificates, borrowed the rest, and "brought it back from the brink."

Young community leaders also rejuvenated the Commercial Club, now called ComCom for Community and Commercial Club, and got a group of others to complete the community brochure that had been talked about for a long time.

ComCom went to the high school business teacher for help, and the school's Future Business Leaders of America club took on the project of distributing a survey of community attitudes. The high schoolers got a 60% return.

The high school business teacher is one of the community's "wild idea" people, who are always coming up with suggestions about what to try next. This local educator is also active in ComCom, and she notes that the club's first meetings were attended only by three or four people. Now 20 to 30 regularly attend. Often you have to be patient, she says: "It takes a long time to get some of these activities to work. But it's worth it to do it right and not fail."

The head of the Community and Commercial Club agrees. "If you don't have persistence to start with, you might as well go back to the drawing board."

Wanting to do something really big, ComCom's president called Up With People, the popular choral group known for its international tour, and convinced them to come to Larimore to perform. The high school gymnasium was sold out that night, and more people were crowded around the entrance when the doors closed.

Attending a regional economic development conference provided a good opportunity for this local leader to reassess what was being done in Larimore and compare his community with other small towns. Mainly, he says, the conference helped him set his sights higher. "I felt like we had never dreamed big enough," he admits. "Many communities started with a lot less than we have."

But Larimore is still fighting apathy, an ever-present danger in many small towns, and leaders here are aware that they must continue to fight negative thinking.

The town needs to keep working at "making people proud of what they have," says the local chiropractor. "I could have lived anywhere . . . There's no place I'd rather be."

The town needs to keep working at "making people proud of what they have," says the local chiropractor, who grew up in the area and then decided to come back. "I could have lived anywhere," she says. "There's no place I'd rather be."

Larimore residents have a lot to be proud of. The number of attractions in Larimore keeps growing: a popular nine-hole golf course is a point of community pride and a new lake and recreation area have just been opened. A huge arboretum, planted with nearly 1000 trees, was installed outside of town by the Meyer Foundation.

While some businesses have been closed in town, others are opening. Among the most recent are a convenience store, a car wash, a novelty shop, and a pizza parlor. New athletic fields, built with military help, are going up for high school events. There's a new senior center and community library and, in the last three years, three new churches. A new playground, also built with military labor, keeps children entertained.

Larimore has also done a good job recently of attracting younger professionals, like the chiropractor and other business owners and managers, into the community. And, as in other small towns, more retired people are moving off the farm and into town.

"Slowly, the people with common sense and guts will win out. They'll change things, and the others will be left behind."

A retired implement dealer, who serves on the board of the nursing home, is excited about the leadership coming from young farmers in the community, and he sees good things in Larimore's future, even though commercial activity has dwindled.

"I'm hoping that I'm promoting other farmers getting involved," he says. "It's ever more evident that farmers are not just 'rural' anymore. They're a part of the larger community."

ComCom's president says he gets frustrated when he hears farm people complaining about the prospect of their tax dollars paying for such things as street improvements in town. They use the streets too, he notes.

But he maintains his enthusiasm about what might be: "Slowly, the people with common sense and guts will win out. They'll change things, and the others will be left behind." ■

"Rosholt, Proud and Alive."
—as seen on a town sign in Rosholt

Rosholt

When the implement dealership in Rosholt, South Dakota, went under, it looked like area farmers were going to have to do without. For two years they'd sought a buyer. One deal looked like it was going to work out, but the financing fell through.

"The bankruptcy judge was going to lock it up," says one area farmer and Rosholt community leader. Then he and seven other Rosholt farmers started an investment club, and the group began negotiations with the bankruptcy judge and all the attorneys. By the time the negotiations were over, the farmers had formed a corporation, bought the building and leased it to a new dealer. An economic victory for the community, the deal saved five jobs and kept the parts store open for local business.

> **"Sometimes we don't appreciate our businesses until they go out of business," then it's too late to get them back.**

Even though some of the investors had to borrow the money, they're determined to keep the dealership open. The risk is worth it, they say, to save the 60-mile round-trip drive to get parts if the local dealership weren't operating.

In rural areas, says one member of the investment group, "sometimes we don't appreciate our businesses until they go out of business," then it's too late to get them back.

In Rosholt, population 450, it's typical behavior for the community to get behind whatever needs to get done, and then see that it happens.

The town's recent 75th anniversary jubilee is another on a long list of examples. According to the head of the community committee that planned the celebration, the jubilee turned into a giant event that produced a profit of nearly $40,000. About half of that has been dedicated to economic development.

"When anything needs to get done, it's done," says the event organizer, whose grandfather helped found the town on an Indian reservation in 1913. "A while back," she remembers, "someone's house caught fire at 6 o'clock in the morning and destroyed the roof. Everyone turned out to help and by 6 the same evening the new roof was on."

Then there's the story of the depot, now home to the newly created historical society's Rosholt Museum, a neat and trim structure that sits in the new park along the highway through town.

The 75th Jubilee Committee heard that the railroad was going to burn down the old depot, a sagging relic of the town's past that was more eyesore than monument. The railroad was willing to sell it for a dollar, but it had to be moved. So townsfolk gingerly jacked it up and moved it across town to the highway.

The town's recent 75th anniversary jubilee turned into a giant event that produced a profit of nearly $40,000. About half of that has been dedicated to economic development.

"People were skeptical but not unsupportive" about the idea of saving the building, the head of the committee says, and they ended up donating the money to move and rebuild it, then volunteered to landscape the site. It took just ten weeks from notice that the depot was facing a bulldozer to its relocation in the new historical park. Now it serves as home to a growing collection of antiques and local artifacts.

"Nothing ever flops in Rosholt," she adds, coining a phrase that could be something of a town motto. Could be, that is, except that the town sign already carries the message: "Rosholt, Proud and Alive."

When the people of this northeastern South Dakota community want to get something done, they seem to come alive with an infectious community enthusiasm that reaches into every corner of the town and the surrounding countryside.

One Rosholt banker, who moved to town nine years ago, is still a newcomer by community standards. He says when somebody comes up with a new idea, it gets talked about for a while and then, if enough people get behind it, a committee is formed and the idea gets translated into action.

Last summer a group decided the town needed street signs so that folks would at least know what their address was. A committee worked on the idea, the town council approved it, and the signs were ordered. The day they were supposed to go up, the committee was worried that it wouldn't have enough help to get the job done, but they decided to start the project anyway.

"Pretty soon," he says, "they had twice as many people as they needed," as townsfolk dropped other things to pitch in.

When somebody comes up with a new idea, it gets talked about for a while and then, if enough people get behind it, a committee is formed and the idea gets translated into action.

A local pork producer who is also head of the Rosholt Historical Society notes that the community is blessed with "lots of community spirit" and what he calls "tireless workers." Among them are a group of retired farmers who live in town and donate countless hours to community projects. "I don't know what we'd do without them," he admits.

"People here work very hard, and they enjoy a lot of good fellowship in the process," he says. "What's that phrase, 'Tough times don't last, tough people do'?"

Like other farm communities, Rosholt has had its tough times. But it is located in one of South Dakota's wealthiest farming areas, and for a town its size Rosholt has a healthy variety of businesses. Among them are a furniture store that sells to a market of up to 100 miles away, an auto dealer that competes in an even larger market, and an elevator that has enjoyed healthy profits for the last decade. The Rosholt Review, a weekly newspaper with a circulation of 1400, hasn't missed an edition in 76 years.

"We've been involved in several business expansions," says the town's banker, pointing out his bank's contributions to economic development. But he concedes that, because of the area's wealth, "it's harder to find loans than it is to find deposits."

The town is not without its problems. Jobs are hard to find and, as a result, most young people leave after school and don't come back. School enrollment, now barely 200 even with transfers from a nearby town keeps dropping, and potential school consolidation is a major topic of conversation in the local cafe.

"I'd like the school to be bigger so we could get more advanced classes," says one high school senior who with a classmate recently won a national Future Homemakers of America award and a trip to California. "We're limited as to job prospects," agrees this classmate. But they both said their trip to the Coast gave them new reasons to like the small town.

There's a healthy attitude about the future in Roshalt, says the administrator of a community-owned nursing home . . . "If you take the attitude that a community is going to dwindle, it will."

One effort to improve job opportunities is an attempt to recruit a small manufacturer that wants to expand into eastern South Dakota. Whether the town lands the new factory or not, the process has been helpful. One of the questions was whether an adequate labor supply existed, so a local labor survey was undertaken.

There's a healthy attitude about the future in Rosholt, says the administrator of a community-owned nursing home. One of the home's problems is lack of qualified employees in the immediate area, so some workers drive up to 50 miles one way each day. At times, she admits, the labor shortage has reached crisis proportions, but she says she's maintained a positive attitude and solutions have been found.

"If you take the attitude that a community is going to dwindle, it will." ■

> **"If there weren't problems to solve, there wouldn't be a role for people like us."**
> **— comment from a Algona entrepreneur**

Algona

Algona, Iowa, population 6000 "and holding," is a town that's learned how to deal with crisis...over and over again...and still keep going.

Here, where an old superstition said the meandering Des Moines River would protect the town from tornadoes, a big one destroyed 100 square blocks — flattening one-third of Algona's homes — on a warm summer day in 1979.

More recently, what one resident described as "civil war" was raging in this, Iowa's biggest county, over a hospital bond issue. A lawsuit was blocking improvement of the highway through town. The town's largest employer was having trouble acquiring the land it needed for a multi-million dollar expansion. A major entrepreneurial initiative went under, taking $250,000 in local investments with it. And the city, the Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Corporation were squabbling about who was supposed to be doing what for community betterment.

> **"Civil war was raging . . . the city, the chamber of commerce and the economic development corporation were squabbling about who was supposed to be doing what."**

A community leader and longtime owner of the local radio station says that he worries that the world is changing faster than small towns like Algona can keep up. He's concerned that the big discount stores are stealing the market out from under the family-owned downtown shops that used to be a major economic strength of rural communities. He wonders if there's enough time in the day for younger leaders to assume the responsibility for the future.

Yet, he says, the Algona community's response to the devastation left in the wake of the tornado showed that, "when the crunch comes, everybody does the right thing."

Now the right thing is strengthening leadership and working together to plan for the future, says one Algona advocate, who is a dynamic force behind a new county leadership program. "The younger people know that they can only stay here if the community thrives."

Like many other smaller towns throughout the cornbelt, Algona is a place where community pride shows and where local people work hard to keep things moving.

In the last three or four years, the highway dispute was resolved and the new roadway completed; the hospital financing question was answered, thanks to some creative thinking about how to overcome the resistance in the northern part of the county; the public and the private sectors have started working together on current problems and planning together for the future.

> **"The younger people know that they can only stay here if the community thrives."**

The Snap-On Corporation got its land for plant expansion, thanks to a public-private partnership and a little civic risk-taking. The result: a giant, state-of-the-art painting facility for Snap-On tool boxes, sold worldwide to professional mechanics.

Pioneer Hi-Bred International underwent a $5 million expansion of its corn production and storage facility, making it one of the agri-business giant's largest plants anywhere. The Hormel plant also added to its capacity, and several other locally owned businesses expanded, including two insurance companies and a metal fabricator whose food processing equipment is sold throughout the U.S. and overseas.

Many things have changed in Algona in recent years. The city administrator says when he arrived in 1986 there was lots of "hornlocking" between the city and the economic development group. The disagreement came to a head when the city canceled its financial contribution to the Economic Development Corporation and forced a confrontation.

When that happened, he says, three representatives each from the city, the Chamber and the Economic Development Board hired a mediator to facilitate a one-day retreat. Taking that risk worked. "It started to create an environment where, now, we are trying to do it all together."

That sentiment was echoed by the executive director of the Chamber of Commerce, who also heads the local development group. He believes "People here are committed to working together to strengthen the community." For example, the chamber and the Economic Development Board held their first long-range planning retreat late last year, reviewing the two organizations' joint mission statement and setting goals for the next five years.

The town has a lot going for it, and what's happening today builds on a solid base.

Algona has two school systems, one public, one private, and both get lots of praise from residents. Churches are strong, too, and there's a healthy diversity to the local economy, with enough non-farm employment — at good wages — to overcome blips in the farm economy.

The town benefits from "people who have a vision for the future" and a willingness to try something new . . . "we've had lots of failures, but also lots of successes."

Once the county was a big milk-producer, for example, and today there's not a dairy herd left. Yet, it's still the nation's seventh largest in pork production. The river cuts a pretty path through and around Algona, and nice homes are sprouting up in attractive, heavily wooded developments ringing the town. Though the growing season is short this close to the Minnesota border, the land is fertile and farmland still gets a good price.

Algona is the major retail center for the area. "We have a good business district without a lot of black holes," says one community leader.

The manager of Algona's highly progressive public utility system says he thinks the town benefits from "people who have a vision for the future" and a willingness to try something new. As a community that occasionally takes a gamble, "we've had lots of failures, but also lots of successes."

Other community leaders agree.

"We have people who are willing to ask the tough questions, take the risks," according to the vice president of one of the town's two savings and loan companies. "People here are really devoted to making Algona better. One of our weaknesses is that we don't always work together. But we're getting better at that."

Some of the recent problems — and the problem-solving that resulted — have taught Algona how to deal more effectively with such situations in the future. The superintendent of public schools says community leaders have learned that "how you manage a controversial issue is as important as the subject of the controversy itself."

Algona is a place that's doing a better job of getting young people into leadership, too, says a local insurance executive who's lived here for 30 years. "We're keeping the senior citizens involved, but when it's time, they step into the background and gracefully let go."

One of those younger leaders is a funeral director who moved here several years ago and just finished a stint as president of the Algona Chamber of Commerce. "We have a variety of newcomers with new ideas to offer, plus drive and a lot of persistence."

> **"People here have a way of getting it done . . . We will do whatever it takes."**

One outcome of that leadership is the new family recreation center, the first phase of which was built with $450,000 in local contributions, all raised by a volunteer group chaired by a young physician who started a practice here 10 years ago.

Another newcomer who has taken on a community leadership role is the president of a local bank. The bank has led the way in cooperating with the savings and loans and the other bank in town to share the risk when businesses need venture capital.

"People here have a way of getting it done," he says, "but they're not always the same people. We will do whatever it takes, but what we're looking for is long-lasting relationships, not just flashes in the pan that create a hundred new jobs today and then are gone tomorrow. We want the relationships to be good for the community, good for the employer, good for the people who work there."

The attitude in Algona says things are working better today, thanks to revitalized leadership and better cooperation.

But there's still recognition that the community's got to keep at it.

One of the challenges that needs attention is keeping senior citizens in the community, says a local banker who calls it "an industry wanting to happen."

> "The next step is to work on development of a strategic plan . . . to focus on where we want to be in five or six years. We're trying to figure out how to do that."

Algona's city administrator says that the town is headed toward a local tax crisis, as residential re-evaluations have resulted in a 21% loss in the local tax base in just four years and the local levy is as high as Iowa law permits.

So far, he says, the increased cooperation has been useful to respond to, not plan, what's coming next. "We've reacted to all the expansions and so forth. We've learned to work together on that. The next step is to work on development of a strategic plan or critical game plan to focus on where we want to be in five or six years. We're trying to figure out how to do that."

The answer to questions like that is an attitude...an attitude that says it can be done.

An area entrepreneur, whose pallet manufacturing company is one of Algona's local business success stories, says, "It takes a healthy balance of attitudes — positive attitudes that will feed on themselves and bring about positive events."

Crises aren't the problem, he says. It's how local leaders respond. "If there weren't problems to solve, there wouldn't be a role for people like us." ■

"It's hard to get the small town out of you."
—comment from a Lyons businessman

Lyons

When the area Pioneer Seed representative invited some townspeople to "tag along" to a Pioneer Search for Solutions conference in November of 1988, community development became a priority in Lyons, Nebraska. The group was so fired up that their challenge was "how to get started in the community without blowing everybody away," says the president of a local bank, who attended the Search conference.

Right away they talked to the Lyons Community Club and started a Strategy Committee for the Club. With an open membership including farmers as well as business people, the Lyons Community Club offered a perfect "grassroots" sounding board for new ideas from Search for Solutions.

"Grassroots" has a special meaning in Lyons. Located on the meandering Logan Creek in northeast Nebraska, some land around Lyons has several feet of topsoil — rich land for bluegrass sod. In the late 60s, an enterprising State Department of Roads employee began cutting sod from pastures to sell in the city. Today, there are five sod farms around Lyons with five hundred acres of bluegrass sod. This is the largest concentration of sod farming from Sioux Falls to Kansas City and Denver to Des Moines. Mowing and cutting sod is a good source of work for young people in the summer, and one local company specializes in laying sod for developers.

We were so fired up that our challenge was "how to get started in the community without blowing everybody away."

On the Fourth of July, Lyons celebrates its fame as the Sod Capital of Nebraska with a Bluegrass Festival that draws about 2500 people.

This town of 1200 has some homegrown industry. For example, Swine Service Specialists has marketing rights for a special hog feeder. Seven employees telemarket this equipment internationally from an office on main street. The feeders are made by a local custom manufacturing company, Brehmer Manufacturing. An industrial development group attracted Behmer to Lyons several years ago with the opportunity to expand in a larger building. "The building looked empty when we moved in; we just steadily filled it up," says the owner of the manufacturing company.

Lyons is a town that draws people home. Retirees, farmers and professional people have moved back for the quality of life.

Businesses in Lyons include a bank and hardware, a furniture store and a prosperous grocery that is large for a town of this size.

Lyons is a town that draws people home. Retirees, farmers and professional people have moved back for the quality of life. "Towns all have a distinct personality, and Lyons has always been a sedate community, comfortable, friendly and a nice place to live," according to a local attorney and vice president of the Community Club.

For some farmers, staying in Lyons has meant creating a second income. One farmer who wanted to return to live in Lyons made it possible by taking over the service station in town. Another farmer-businessman spends every spare minute free from his farming as a photographer for weddings, graduations and commercial customers. A third Lyons farmer doubles as a Farm Credit loan officer in a larger town nearby.

Several Lyons area farmers formed a study group to learn about futures markets, and now they conduct seminars and do consulting for other farmers. And another local farmer developed a soybean-based protein feed for his hog confinement operation. After a year and a half of testing, this entrepreneur purchased a dry extrusion process machine and began to supply neighbors with feed. One week last November, he and two employees worked 127 hours to fill the orders.

"Once it starts growing, it's hard to put brakes on it without going out of business," he says.

As in other healthy rural communities, Lyons supports an excellent school system. Bond issues consistently carry on the first vote. The area is well served by a hospital in a neighboring town, with a clinic in Lyons and a reliable volunteer rescue squad. Cooperation among the churches in Lyons is counted as a big plus for the town, and the elderly population is also considered a strength. A manor on the edge of town and apartments for seniors attract elderly retirees to Lyons.

Before November of 1988, there was a feeling that life was good in Lyons, friendly and comfortable. And maybe a little bit stagnant. When the group returned from the Search for Solutions conference, that suddenly changed. The new Community Club Strategy Committee began to meet regularly at 6:30 in the morning. The public was always invited and all meetings were reported in the local paper.

From hearing about Search for Solutions "Winning Communities," town leaders had learned that it is important to be focused. Using the Heartland Center's "20 Clues to Rural Community Survival," they developed a statement of purpose for the Strategy Committee.

In just five months, volunteers designed and constructed a sod house in the city park.

The Strategy Committee had also learned that "homespun ideas are the ones that catch fire," according to the local Pioneer sales rep. They invited broad-based involvement with surveys and town hall meetings. Over 30 ideas for community projects were proposed, and soon several of these projects were underway involving as many volunteers as possible. The park was cleaned up, the old caboose repainted.

People decided to promote Lyons as the Sod Capital of Nebraska and sponsored a logo contest. A special postmark touting the Bluegrass Festival was arranged to go on every piece of mail that leaves Lyons from May 15 through July 15. Several citizens found pictures of sod houses in old family albums. In just five months, in time for the July Bluegrass Festival, volunteers designed and constructed a sod house in the city park.

A mini-park on main street was targeted for improvement. In just nine months, volunteers raised funds; installed a sprinkler system, benches and fencing, and landscaped the mini-park with shade trees, new sod and shrubs. The local VFW erected a veterans memorial in the mini-park.

Six people followed up on an idea for a craft and antique co-op store that was suggested at a town hall meeting. They arranged for space in a downtown location and worked out contract details. With volunteer labor, they renovated the building to create 16 spaces for artists and craftspeople. Three months later, Talents and Treasures Mini Mall was open for business. Each seller rents a space for a monthly fee plus a 10 per cent commission on items sold. Each renter works two or three days a month in the store.

One of the purposes adopted by the Strategy Committee was the transition of power to younger leaders. People in Lyons made special efforts to involve young people. "We have to let kids know we are ready to listen to what they have to say. I think Search for Solutions really brought that to our attention," says the city's mayor. Members of the Strategy Committee visited the high school classes for brainstorming sessions, and young people were invited to the town hall meetings.

> **One of the purposes adopted by the Strategy Committee was the transition of power to younger leaders... "We have to let kids know we are ready to listen to what they have to say."**

Lyons' mayor has remained active on the Strategy Committee. Having moved to Lyons from St. Paul, Minnesota, the mayor is a strong supporter of the community and says she loves her new home and believes in its future. This one year of accomplishment really "let people know we are serious. The projects we chose have come true." Some projects like the sod house were chosen to show immediate results. Others like the mini-park took longer and showed that people could stick with it.

With this experience of success, the people of Lyons are ready to take on longer term projects. Residents are talking about a new community recreation center, and a Community Foundation has been established as the first step. Not long ago, people would talk about how the lagoon in the park used to be full of water for fishing and recreation. Now they talk about how the lagoon can be restored.

Not long ago, people would talk about how the lagoon in the park used to be full of water for fishing and recreation. Now they talk about how the lagoon can be restored.

People want to return to small towns like Lyons because, as one businessman puts it, "it's hard to get the small town out of you." And in Lyons today, people are creating their own small town of the future. ■

"We all want to make Wray an even better place."
—comment from a Wray Recreation and Activities Center Board Member

Wray

How do community leaders shape a vision for the future and communicate that vision to others in the community? How do leaders build a consensus that supports a vision of the future and motivates community members to work together toward a shared goal? How do leaders persist in driving forward no matter how difficult or impossible the goal?

In Wray, Colorado, leaders have found answers to those questions.

Situated in the northeastern plains of Colorado, Wray is considered Centennial Country, a reference to the Michener novel that celebrated the hardy ranchers who settled there. It's true that the community of Wray is what most would call remote and isolated, but the achievements of this small western town would make any size community proud.

"I look around and see a town that really wants to be here."

This town of 2200 is nestled between the north fork of the Republican River and the white limestone bluffs near the Kansas and Nebraska borders. The commitment to farming and ranching is strong here. Yuma County is the largest corn growing county in the nation thanks to hard work and center-pivot irrigation.

The residents of Wray have always been proud of the quality of life they enjoy here. The town has a reputation for welcoming newcomers and supporting neighbors as well as surviving hard times. "I look around and see a town that really wants to be here," explains the pastor of one of Wray's larger churches.

People here are proud of the churches and the Ministerial Association that collaborates on many social service and youth projects. They're proud of the Art Guild and the annual art show it sponsors with more than 300 entries from the area. A strong, diverse main street business community has helped the town remain strong over the years, and the Chamber of Commerce went all out for the 1986 centennial with a weekend celebration that brought 4000 people to town.

Visitors to Wray comment on the beautiful new school on its 70-acre site and the active connections between the school and community.

For example, the Wray Task Force, formed of students, parents and teachers, has won the praise of the state of Colorado for its work in drug abuse prevention. The Task Force has decreased teenage drinking in town but has also developed many alternative activities for youngsters as well as peer counseling and mentoring programs. According to one school administrator, "This community is remarkable for broad involvement in decision-making. These folks are really good problem solvers."

> **"This community is remarkable for broad involvement in decision-making. These folks are really good problem solvers."**

Even more remarkable than the new school is the small hospital in Wray which enjoys the services of three doctors, one a surgeon in his mid-30s who returned to his hometown to practice. Excellent health care services are one of Wray's strengths and offer a vital resource to the surrounding area.

But beyond the strong schools and medical services, stable businesses and weekly newspaper, the community of Wray is joined together around a unique project that exemplifies the community's vision of the future.

Wray's leaders have had a vision of the future that has for several years organized activities and concentrated energy on a single project: the Wray Rehabilitation and Activities Center (WRAC).

The idea of an indoor recreation center combined with rehabilitation facilities has been discussed here for more than 20 years. About five years ago, a group started work on the project and the WRAC really got started. "We remembered the idea from way back and finally decided to do something about it," explains one WRAC Board member.

The combination of recreation and rehabilitation into one community facility is a sterling example of strategic thinking on the part of Wray's leadership.

The combination of recreation and rehabilitation into one community facility is a sterling example of strategic thinking on the part of Wray's leadership.

In this way, both leisure and health needs will be met, and a considerable enhancement will be applied to the community's quality of life. Several generations or age groups will be served by such a combination, and that speaks to the changing demographics of the community's population.

The core group of leaders devoted to the WRAC project first surveyed the community to assess the need and level of support for the project. The majority of residents thought it was a great idea but were doubtful that it could be done. It seemed like an idea that was good, but too big for the town.

The nine members of the board began with a concept that about $300,000 was needed to remodel an old school building for use as the rehabilitation and recreation center. However, dreams have a way of growing and spreading out in Wray, and board members soon found themselves developing a construction project that would require nearly two million dollars to complete.

Fund raising is a task that often presents almost insurmountable obstacles for small communities. The WRAC Board members, however, took on the job of raising money with great energy and creativity. They've organized almost every fund raising event possible, from rubber duck races on the river to "Mayor for a Day" certificates that cost a mere $20 in contributions to the WRAC.

While these types of community events do raise funds, they also help keep the populace informed and aware of the project and thus serve an educational and marketing purpose.

The most significant contribution to date has probably been an initial gift of $150,000 from a local foundation, the Kitzmiller-Bales Trust. That substantial gift has helped to leverage many additional contributions.

Because the non-profit WRAC organization wasn't eligible, the city of Wray helped out by sponsoring WRAC's application for a state grant program that eventually brought $240,000 into the construction fund. A flexible, creative approach to the grant program on the part of the city as well as the state allowed an innovative use of the state funds. "Because we helped out by sponsoring this grant application, the city of Wray will actually own the HVAC systems in the Center," says the mayor.

> **"We haven't always agreed on every topic, but we've always agreed to keep on working."**

The combination of private donations, gifts from the community trust, state funds and contributions from corporations such as Pioneer have helped the WRAC Board achieve its fund raising goal of $1.8 million.

The WRAC Board has shown considerable sophistication in its ability to combine fun and serious work towards a goal. That's not to say there haven't been discouraging times or lots of hard work. The group has met weekly at 6 a.m. for five years and shared the successes and struggles along the way. "We haven't always agreed on every topic, but we've always agreed to keep on working," says a WRAC Board member.

By consistently doing research and investigating information sources and models of other similar projects, the WRAC Board and the people of Wray have managed to set a goal and achieve it. "At this point, I really think we could do anything," boasts a board member when asked about the future.

Goal-setting is a skill that's based on the ability to project the preferred future. Project planning takes the skill to see the individual tasks necessary to reach the goal. Both are learnable.

> **"Picture it . . . but better yet, change visions to creations, change imagination to fact . . ."**

But that vision of the future and the inspiration it takes to persevere are qualities of leadership that represent real community treasures.

As one community leader from Wray has written, "Picture it . . . but better yet, change visions to creations, change imagination to fact . . ."

The people of Wray, Colorado are doing just that. ■

> **"I can see how a town can die if no one does anything."**
> **—comment from a Cheney resident**

Cheney

In Cheney, Kansas, a community of 1500, economic development is spelled day care. In this small town on the Kansas plains, where more and more adults commute to Wichita and its big city jobs, parents can drop off their children at My World Child Care Center as early as 5:30 a.m., confident they'll be in good hands for the entire day.

My World is not the only way Cheney residents look after the needs of children and youth, however. The local school is a big source of community pride, with its new elementary school addition, improvements in older buildings, and a completely renovated and updated running track. When a survey showed that students were experimenting a lot with alcohol and tobacco, a community task force was formed to deal with it.

> **"There were lots of negative thinkers . . . people who said it would never go. But you never do anything if you don't stick your neck out."**

Unlike many small towns in America's heartland, Cheney is growing. New houses are going up, and existing homes sell quickly. Some of the growth is a result of urban flight, as more people look beyond Wichita toward the less complicated life of a small town. But Cheney is also attracting some new, light industry and several local businesses are growing.

Cheney's Ford and Chevy dealerships, owned by four brothers, are selling cars to buyers from all the bigger towns around. Growth in the last five years has been phenomenal, and they're selling four times more new cars and pickups than the automakers expect.

A local insurance business has tripled in less than six years. And the owner of Cheney Variety is competing with Wal-Mart and the larger shopping centers in nearby Wichita with a unique combination of traditional "notions" and newer retail hits, such as name-brand athletic shoes.

Keeping local retail dollars in the community is important and Cheney businesses emphasize convenience and service with a personal touch.

Still, it's the day care center that really sets Cheney apart and shows how this community is thinking ahead. My World was started after its owner attended a Pioneer Search for Solutions conference with her husband, the local Pioneer seed sales rep. At the Pioneer conference, good information about day care from an exhibitor struck a common chord with this Cheney resident.

"I love kids," she says, "and I thought there was a possibility that some children needed better care. Before we opened, Cheney had no licensed child care at all."

That was a year ago, when the dream for the day care facility was to fill half of the 100 state-approved slots by the end of the first year of operations. Shortly after My World celebrated its first anniversary, however, enrollment hit 91.

The Center serves children from 2 weeks to 12 years, and a well-trained staff of 18 is responsible for implementing a sophisticated child development curriculum, preparing meals, and getting children of school age off to class in the morning and back in the afternoon.

Leadership here is good at identifying what needs to be done and then getting lots of people involved in doing it.

Half of the parents on My World's customer list commute to Wichita for work; 25% are single parents.

The center was started as a private business and built with a local bank loan. Its owner hopes the facility will become profitable in its third year. But she says it wouldn't survive without lots of community support, including donations of equipment and playthings.

"There were lots of negative thinkers...people who said it would never go. "But," she adds, "you never do anything if you don't stick your neck out."

That's a quality this town seems to share. There are several stories about new business start-ups, with local investors, that went under after brief early success. But those failures don't seem to have discouraged other ideas.

Leadership here is good at identifying what needs to be done and then getting lots of people involved in doing it.

For example, Cheney's the site of the county fair, which hadn't kept up with the times. The fair was close to going under when a group of younger leaders joined the fair board and gave themselves five years to "make it grow or let it go."

> **We came away from Search really believing 'you gotta do it yourself.' "We know something is going to happen when we concentrate on our assets and not worry about the negatives."**

Several of today's younger leaders, of which there are many in Cheney, have attended Search for Solutions conferences and talk in positive terms about what they came away with.

"After the conference, we called a city-wide meeting. We came away from Search really believing 'you gotta do it yourself.' A core of people arose in leadership positions and several subcommittees were formed," says the community's superintendent of schools. "We know something is going to happen when we concentrate on our assets and not worry about the negatives."

The result of this positive thinking and positive action is new park development, a more active city government, and success in getting a part-time doctor. Cheney has also been successful in raising the matching funds needed to receive a federal grant for a city golf course.

A city administrator sees survival for Cheney as people coming together with different views of what the future ought to be but working toward a shared vision for the community's future. "We want whatever happens to be our choice and not something that happens to us."■

"I learned that small communities don't have to die."
—comment from a Hartley resident

Hartley

Leaders in Hartley, Texas, are fighting an uphill battle to keep the town going. But they're better organized today than they were two or three years ago, thanks to a group of local people who are working hard to create a new sense of community.

Located in the northwest corner of the Texas panhandle, an hour's drive from Amarillo, Hartley (pop. 300) has been whipsawed badly by the farm economy at least three times in local memories, going back to the depression of the 1930s. Poor prices for this year's wheat crop and dour predictions about wheat futures aren't helping to build local confidence among area farmers today.

But there are new, hopeful signs for the community and the economy here. And hard work and a recognition of the value of working together are making a difference on both fronts.

"The community was separated into cliques. We felt like we had to have a way of bringing people together again. Yet there was no mechanism for discussing community problems. The Lions Club was a first attempt."

The renewed sense of community is the result of efforts of the Hartley Lions Club, which was started up again after many years and reinvigorated by a dozen local men and women who wanted to get townsfolk talking again about what they have in common.

The superintendent of schools in Hartley says the enthusiasm behind the Lions Club was generated at a Pioneer Hi-Bred Search for Solutions conference about two years ago.

"The community was separated into cliques," he said. "We felt like we had to have a way of bringing people together again. Yet there was no mechanism for discussing community problems. The Lions Club was a first attempt."

The gamble paid off. Lions members are focusing some of their attention on improvements to the aging Community Building, a World War II era barracks that was moved to Hartley from a now defunct air base nearby. A solar heating system, built by Lions members and financed through community contributions, is preventing pipe freeze-up and reducing the heat bill.

The Lions Club also organizes chuckwagon suppers, community gatherings held a dozen or more times for each of the last two summers, which attract up to 100% of the community's residents. The district SCS conservationist, who with his wife does the cooking for the events, believes that cooperative efforts are needed if small towns are to survive.

"In this community we haven't talked about — verbalized — what we want to do. We've just worked a lot, gutted it out. A little community needs a place to verbalize its goals."

"Rural America is taking a beating. But things aren't going to get any better unless we do something ourselves," he says. "We're trying to get a sense of togetherness."

Another member in the Hartley Lions Club, one of the Texas clubs that first allowed women to join, says the town is blessed with lots of risk takers, and now they are taking risks for the community's future. "You don't run into anything that people aren't willing to try."

Her husband, who managed farms in the Middle East and Africa after his retirement, says he senses a change in mood in Hartley, which was once split by disagreement over hospital district boundaries. "It was always friendly, but now people are more open to pulling together."

Hartley people are also pulling together in business. Forty people are employed at Thompson Agriplex, an ag-related business, which operates a feed lot, mechanics shop, tire repair service, fertilizer distribution, trucking company and elevator.

The company's founder, who oversees the enterprise from a modern, computer-age office on the highway, is also leading a joint venture that is trying to manage risk in the cattle feeding business. Thirty-two local investors raised $400,000, got a million-dollar line of credit, and went into the business of buying and selling cattle together. First year's return: 22%.

By spreading risk over larger numbers of producers and a greater share of the market, higher returns are possible, says this local entrepreneur. He hopes that the same cooperative approach is working in the community, as well.

"In this community we haven't talked about—verbalized—what we want to do," he explains. " We've just worked a lot, gutted it out. A little community needs a place to verbalize its goals."

One goal that is heard here a lot is keeping open the school, which has just 125 students from kindergarten through 12th grade. A local resident, who with her husband is developing a 2000-acre private hunting preserve, is a driving force behind a new parent organization that hopes to join PTA.

"I have five children of my own, and through reading, I learned how parent involvement can enhance the school environment," she said. "I think by becoming a PTA we'll have a better idea of what we're about. And we'll be able to use resources from the state and national PTA levels."

"Rural America is taking a beating. But things aren't going to get any better unless we do something ourselves. We're trying to get a sense of togetherness."

Hartley's strong school system is an important community asset and residents here work hard to maintain its excellence. Hartley patrons pay the highest school taxes in the state. The investment pays off: 65% to 70% of seniors, some times more, go to colleges or trade schools. The school has been in the top 5% in the state for test scores the last three years. In the future, new state regulations that help small schools stay open if children are succeeding may benefit Hartley.

An Agriplex employee, who also attended the Search for Solutions conference, says the community's future may depend on the school. And she adds, the school together with better housing options could help the town attract some new residents.

"If the Search conference did one thing for Hartley," she says, "it was to build some confidence that local leaders can make a difference. I learned that communities don't have to die."

"We've got to stimulate the community, get everybody by the hand. Team spirit can get it done"

Positive changes are being felt throughout the community. One area resident, who grew up near Hartley and has farmed here all his life, says he sees lots of signs that local people want to work harder, even against some odds. "Tough times cause people to pull together."

Another local farmer agrees, "We've got to stimulate the community, get everybody by the hand. Team spirit can get it done." ■

In an Industrial Age, location was considered the critical variable in community survival and local economic vitality. Today, in an Information Age, leadership plays the same crucial role.

Communities in Transition

In 1991, the Heartland Center for Leadership Development began working with the Center for the New West on a project to identify healthy Great Plains communities and analyze their successful transition into an information-based economy.

The project is part of a multi-year comprehensive study on the future of the Great Plains region initiated by the Center for the New West, a Denver-based "think tank."

To assist with the study, the Heartland Center developed and tested a community case study design which will serve as a model for conducting additional field studies and for analyzing existing case study literature.

The Heartland Center's "Model for Case Study Research and Analysis for Studying Communities in Transition" is concerned with the overall health of a community and with evidence related to transition into an information-based economy from a local, community or county perspective. In addition, the case study model is designed to seek new ways of analyzing economic transition from the bottom up to detect positive indicators of economic change. The model builds on (and adds considerably to) the Heartland Center's applied research approach on successful communities.

The following case study, which focuses more on economic transition than other Heartland Center "healthy community" profiles, was developed using the Heartland Center's new model for case study research.

"We have to get together to plan, to dream, and then to find a way to make that dream a reality."
—comment from a hospital administrator in Superior

Superior

The people of Superior, Nebraska, (pop. 2400) have heard about the theories that the Great Plains should be turned back to the buffalo, but they're not paying much attention to what outsiders say about their community's chances for survival.

What they are doing is learning how to work together, getting more people involved in local leadership, setting priorities for new projects under the guidance, mainly, of a core of volunteers who want their small town to keep up with changing times.

Superior, located near the Kansas border, is 60 miles from an Interstate highway. The nearest large town, with 23,000 people and a new Wal-Mart, is a 50-mile drive away.

Some see the location as a handicap. It's hard to get semi-trailer trucks in and out of the Mid-America Dairymen cheese factory, where 170 employees produce most of the mozzarella for Godfather's Pizza throughout the U.S.

It is important for the town's leaders to learn to think strategically if Superior is going to prosper.

Others see it as a plus. The town has an active retail community, and on Main Street, all the storefronts are filled. A modern medical center serves a population base of 8,000 in Nebraska and Kansas. And a large reservoir and recreation area, just over the Kansas border, bring people into town to shop.

Competition for local loyalty is viewed here as a positive factor. The town has two banks and two savings and loans, for example, and two up-to-date-groceries.

A rallying point for the town has been a new focus for community development: It's staked out its claim to the title, "Victorian Capital of Nebraska," exploiting the presence in town of a number of lovely Victorian-style homes. The theme is reinforced with the new "Lady Vestey Festival," named for a turn-of-the-century native who made a fortune working in the meat-packing industry after she moved to Chicago and then married into English nobility.

Now a huge celebration named after Lady Vestey is planned for each Memorial Day. The festival idea resulted from the community's efforts to write a strategic plan.

It is important for the town's leaders to learn to think strategically if Superior is going to prosper, believes the hospital's administrator. "We have to get together to plan, to dream, and then to find a way to make that dream a reality."

"You can't compete with Wal-Mart. You've got to find a niche" that stores such as Wal-Mart can't fill.

The hospital itself is one of Nebraska's rural health care success stories. From its own strategic planning, the hospital has cautiously but successfully expanded, making Superior a regional center for CAT scans and other new health care technologies.

Like so many other towns on the Plains, however, this one was in an economic bind during the farm crisis of the mid-80s. Here, though, the trauma was made worse when a World War II-vintage cement plant was closed and 150 well-paid workers were laid off. A year later, a large meat-packer in a nearby community also closed, putting another 150 out of work. At about the same time, J.C. Penney closed the Superior store, and the community lost its largest local retailer.

Some residents thought Superior wouldn't survive that triple blow. But now a few leaders believe the cement plant's closing may have had some positive impacts. Several said wages at the plant, running $18 an hour plus generous benefits, were "artificially high" for the area, creating a false sense of security for the local economy.

While the economic base hasn't changed drastically since Superior was founded in 1872, there's lots of interesting economic activity, much of it related in some way to global economic transformation.

> **"Our town is doing business differently today....If you don't change the way you think, your business will decline."**

AGREX, a subsidiary of Mitsubishi, operates a space-age elevator here, and it exports internationally about 25% of the grain it ships, mainly via unit trains to Mexico. As the northernmost point on the Santa Fe Railroad, Superior can transport locally grown products quickly and efficiently into the southwest, Mexico and the Gulf.

The Farmer's Co-Op has more than tripled its business volume in the last five years. It now ships grain from the area directly to Mexico and the West Coast.

The cheese plant, home to three unique dairy-industry processes, hosts overseas visitors on a regular basis. They come to marvel at the plant's modern technology and, according to the plant manager, see if they can learn enough to replicate the plant's patented innovations back home.

The cheese plant has also enjoyed record-setting growth, doubling its work force since 1983 and increasing production by 700%.

The owner of a local graphics business, whose custom-designed T-shirts promote the Victorian homes tour, is learning how to expand his market. He bought the latest computer graphics software for his T-shirt designs and now is supplying a mail order house in Nevada. He knew he couldn't survive on hometown sales alone. "You have to have a product you can sell outside," he said.

Many residents agree that businesses and communities must change and adapt if they're going to survive.

"Our town is doing business differently today," says a local veterinarian, who is typical of area business owners who are trying hard to stay at the cutting edge of their specialty. His large-animal practice serves about 1,000 farmers, and he and his two partners saw their business increase 17% last year. The entire operation is heavily computerized, and they've started a newsletter to keep clients up to date on innovative practices and treatments.

"If you don't change the way you think, your business will decline," he says.

The two banks have learned that lesson, as well. Both the Farmers State Bank and Security National bought branches in smaller towns in Nebraska and over the border in Kansas. The Farmers State Bank also expanded into residential loans throughout Nebraska and has loan representatives in several larger towns as far as 200 miles away.

The local newspaper publisher figured he'd have to lay off at least two employees when the cement plant went under and when he lost a large commercial customer. "Then I read an article in *The Wall Street Journal* about single fellas staying on the job in the country, while women had to go to the city to find work." His entrepreneurial response is a newsletter called "Country Connections," which matches up men and women who are looking for partners and want to stay in or return to rural areas. Its national circulation of 1,700 has saved the two jobs that were threatened, and the newsletter's got the town lots of publicity, generated by features on CBS and National Public Radio and in *The New York Times*.

> **"If you sing a tale of woe, after a while everyone will believe it."**

He says his own business and the others that are flourishing have had to learn to change with the times. "You can't compete with Wal-Mart. You've got to find a niche" that stores such as Wal-Mart can't fill. "If you sing a tale of woe, after a while everyone will believe it."

The town's strategic planning effort, called START for the acronym of the state economic development program that fostered it, has had a lot to do with changing local attitudes and getting new people into leadership. Besides the Lady Vestey Festival, the strategic plan led to construction of a trolley for tours of Victorian homes, a new track and field at the school, renovation of the band shell and several city park improvements. It also resulted in a series of leadership seminars designed to get more people active in community affairs.

People in Superior have made the choice to live here because of what the community has to offer.

A local stockbroker, who moved here a year ago, chose Superior among 200 towns where he could have relocated. He likes the "tremendous community spirit" and he believes people here are "willing to take a chance."

And then there's one of the town's physicians. She had grown up and raised a family here, then she decided to change careers. Nine years later she returned and started a family medical practice. In the early '80s, the town had lost all its physicians. Now it's back up to four.

Not everything's okay in Superior, though. People say day care and senior care need more attention. The school has a good reputation, but some parents wish it could offer more in math, science and foreign language. There aren't enough things for kids to do, and not enough jobs to keep them after high school or bring them back after college. The need for more loyalty to local businesses is heard here, too. Some people still hope that mythical clean, light industry will come to town, create 100 high-paying jobs, and stay forever.

"We're just a microcosm of what's going on in the larger economy."

But there's still an undeniable enthusiasm that folks say just wasn't here a few years back.

From an economic standpoint, Superior is trying to learn how to keep up with the highly volatile, increasingly global economy that every town, large or small, must face. Looking up and down Main Street, one local banker talks about how the face of retail has changed and is still changing. He points to the shoe store that just opened and, across the street, storefront renovations that accompany a retail expansion.

"Retailers have to change or go out of business," he says. "It's the same in every part of our economy here."

He pauses and then reflects: "We're just a microcosm of what's going on in the larger economy." ■

Heartland Center for Leadership Development

20 clues to rural community survival

1. Evidence of community pride.
2. Emphasis on quality in business and community life.
3. Willingness to invest in the future.
4. Participatory approach to community decision-making.
5. Cooperative community spirit.
6. Realistic appraisal of future opportunities.
7. Awareness of competitive positioning.
8. Knowledge of the physical environment.
9. Active economic development program.
10. Deliberate transition of power to a younger generation of leaders.
11. Acceptance of women in leadership roles.
12. Strong belief in and support for education.
13. Problem-solving approach to providing health care.
14. Strong multi-generational family orientation.
15. Strong presence of traditional institutions that are integral to community life.
16. Attention to sound and well-maintained infrastructure.
17. Careful use of fiscal resources.
18. Sophisticated use of information resources.
19. Willingness to seek help from the outside.
20. Conviction that, in the long run, you have to do it yourself.

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